

Comparing philosophers hobbes and locke philosophy essay



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Social contract is an essential principle applied in most societies in the world. Many nations have elected governments which are tasked with maintaining rule of law. Sovereignty of countries is therefore given to governments in exchange of maintaining order. Social contract therefore forms the legitimacy of governments since they require consent from the governed people in order to be considered legitimate. This is seen as important principle which encourages individual and social order. Some of the most important philosophers who advanced arguments for social contract include Locke, Hobbes and Rousseau. They however held different views on social contract with Locke supporting liberal monarchy and Hobbes supporting authoritarian monarchy.

Their arguments have set the framework for development of theories such as liberal democracy, constitutional monarchy, republicanism and others. Their theories have also been implemented in many democracies across the world. This paper will evaluate Locke's and Hobbes' arguments on social contract with specific focus on the differences in their approach to the topic. The paper will then take one viewpoint from among the two discussed and explain why it is superior to the other. The discussed issues will be summarized at the end.

Hobbes' view of social contract

Hobbes was of the opinion that authoritarian monarchy is the most effective form of social order in society. In this form of organization, the people submit to the authority or leadership. Hobbes supported leadership where exclusive power was given to leaders or a political class (Adams 2003). This form of leadership has several characteristics which include the concentration of

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power among leaders and the use of strategies such as exclusion of challengers and political repression to maintain authority. In this form of leadership, Hobbes was of the view that mass organizations and political parties are effective in mobilizing the population around the goals of a political system. He supported this political system since he viewed men as equal and therefore preventing conflict amongst them was impossible. Man fought for basic necessities and material possession which would ultimately lead to social collapse. The authoritarian monarchy was viewed as most effective in stemming this chaos in society. Hobbes supported monarchy since it was difficult for monarchs to disagree with themselves.

However, this system of governance features unpopular leadership strategies such as rigging of elections, making of political decisions by the minority as well as presence of bureaucracy. Leaders are appointed by the political class without participation of citizens and there is unregulated and informal use of power. This system also features intolerance for the opposition and deprivation of civil liberties. In order to control political power, the military is often used in states which exercise authoritarian forms of power. Social control is maintained by regulating the civil society and establishing allegiance through use of socialization processes. These forms of leadership are usually weakened by poor performance of the political class with regards to people's needs. Many collapse due to revolution by the population against leadership. During the Cold War, the USSR governance system is an example of the authoritarian rule in society. Currently, countries such as Chad and North Korea adhere to this governance system.

Locke's view of social contract

Locke supported liberal monarchy which supports equal rights and liberty in governance. This leadership structure supports liberal democracy, constitutions, human rights, free elections, free trade, capitalism and religious freedom (Arnold 2006). It is also known as constitutional monarchy. In this political system, a monarch acts as head of state and derives power from the constitution. In many liberal monarchies, parliamentary systems are applied and these serve the purpose of checking excesses by the executive. In the past, liberal monarchy co-existed with quasi-fascist, fascist or military dictatorship. Liberal monarchy systems believe in going to war in cases of aggression although use of unilateral force is not supported as it encourages cycles of violence. Locke believed that liberal monarchy would best protect private property and encourage liberty; two of the most important amenities enjoyed by humans (Locke 2003). He viewed the human nature as being driven by self preservation and survival instincts, which made it necessary to have a supreme power in order to maintain social order. The social contract between people being governed and the sovereign authority achieved this objective.

There are various weaknesses which are associated with the liberal monarchy governance system. The first is that although representatives are elected, these are few individuals who make decisions on behalf of the whole system. In essence, power is therefore held by few individuals who have a similar ability to misuse it as is seen in the authoritative governance system. Some critics, especially those who have Marxist roots, argue that this governance system is controlled by the rich as opposed to the majority. It is

therefore not democratic as it is class based. The rich have the power and resources to ensure they are elected into power, which defeats the objectives of the system. In such systems, religious and ethnic conflicts are also often seen and this is viewed as a weakness of the system. In authoritarian rule, the government would stem such conflicts and restore social order. Finally, these governance systems are seen to focus on short term objectives as opposed to long term ones. Since the election of government is held regularly, legislators focus on short term goals which would make them popular with the electorate as opposed to long term ones which may not be visible within short term durations. Current liberal monarchies include Bahrain, Bahamas, Australia, Denmark, Canada, Cambodia, Lesotho, Monaco, Malaysia, Norway, Sweden, UK, Thailand and others.

Differences between Hobbes' and Locke's approach to social contract theory

A major difference between Hobbes' and Locke's views on social contract is that Hobbes believes in authoritarian rule where the political power yields absolute power while Locke believes in the power of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights (Hegel 2001). Locke believed in protecting private property and liberty while Hobbes believed that human beings were incapable of living without conflict unless an authoritarian authority restored order. Another difference between these theories is that Locke views society as possessing power to overthrow governments. Locke viewed society as creators of the government which gave them power to overthrow it.

However, Hobbes views the government as a powerful monarch which the

people cannot overthrow. Locke is of the opinion that abolishing a government and replacing it with another as upholding the social contract.

Unlike Hobbes who viewed the human nature as driven to fight for basic necessities and material possession which would ultimately lead to social collapse, Locke believed that God had created human beings with wisdom which could prevent their greedy nature from taking over. Locke also believed that the social contract between the authoritative monarch and the people would not be fair as two distinctive groups would emerge; property owners and the poor. The poor would then have different contracts from the rich and they would suffer under this rule.

Personal opinion on the best social contract approach

I believe that Locke's social contract approach is the most effective in maintaining social order in society. Liberal monarchy advocates for equal rights and liberty in governance. This leadership structure supports liberal democracy, constitutions, human rights, free elections, free trade, capitalism and religious freedom. There are several reasons which I will advance for support of Locke's liberal monarchy political system and these arguments will be contrasted against Hobbes' theories to prove that the latter is inferior in achieving stable political and social unit.

The first reason for support of Locke's approach is political and economic stability. Many countries across the world have enjoyed economic and political stability from democracy over centuries. In fact, most countries of the world follow a structure similar to liberal monarchy which supports equal rights and democratic election of government officials. These countries have

enjoyed stability since they make decisions based on the rule of the majority. Democracy is followed in making political decisions and the people participate in political systems through the officials they elect. Due to this, most people support democratic regimes since they stand for what the majority advocates for. However, countries which have followed Hobbes' authoritative leadership styles have experienced conflicts and revolutions. This is due to the reason that the leadership goals are not in line with what the people stand for. The fact that oppression and intolerance for opposition strategies are used also reduces public confidence in the political class. Governments which have been overthrown as a result of using this system include Tunisia, USSR, Uganda, Cuba, Germany, France and others.

. Another reason why I support Locke's social contract approach is that it upholds human rights. Human rights are the basic freedoms which people enjoy. Some of the rights upheld by this system include the right to own property, right to religious freedom, right of expression and others. Locke supports safeguarding of rights according to the constitution. He advocates for protection of property and justice. However, Hobbes vests power in a few people who make all political decisions. These people in power hold the rights of the society and they make unilateral decisions of what is acceptable or not. This can be seen to be infringement of human rights which everyone should have access to. This makes Hobbes' leadership approach unacceptable in the modern society.

Finally, history has proven that countries which have practiced Locke's approach have prospered while those which have applied Hobbes' approach have collapsed in the long run. Many revolutions such as the French
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revolution and Cuban revolution as well as the collapse of countries such as the USSR can be attributed to the use of Hobbes' authoritarian monarchy leadership system. Current revolutions against countries such as Tunisia and Egypt can also be traced to the use of a similar approach. On the other hand, economically and politically stable countries in the modern world such as UK, US and others have applied the democratic governance system. This shows that Locke's approach is more effective in maintaining social order than Hobbes' approach.

Summary and conclusion

Social contract has been discussed to be a form of gaining government legitimacy through giving governments sovereignty in exchange for maintaining order. Locke and Hobbes are important philosophers who analyzed social contract theories. However, their approaches were different with Locke supporting liberal monarchy and Hobbes supporting authoritarian monarchy. Both approaches have weaknesses and strengths which have been discussed in the paper. The most effective approach to apply in leadership especially in the modern world is Locke's approach which supports liberal democracy, constitutions, human rights, free elections, free trade, capitalism and religious freedom. This approach is consistent with the needs of several societies and it has been successfully implemented in many states. Hobbes' approach has failed in several countries due to revolution against the political class which practices authoritarian rule.

It is important for leaders to embrace leadership which supports respect for human rights, democracy and protection of property. History has proven that this is the most effective leadership style. Leaders who have failed to

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embrace democracy have faced revolutions and the current ones in Tunisia and Egypt can be traced to the weaknesses in Hobbes' leadership style. When leaders impose their will on the people, there is likely to be resistance since the majority will not have their way. Although strategies such as repression work in the short term, eventually the people lose faith in leadership and a revolution is born. Leaders should therefore follow Locke's liberal monarchy political system and embrace democracy. Once democracy is embraced, human rights protected and the constitution is adhered to, the leadership gains support from the people. This ensures that order is maintained within states and that people live in harmony and peace.