

Social progressions essay



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As man progresses from his primitive origins he begins to create societies and groups. As these societies grow more complex he must adapt his own methods and progress through a series of social progressions.

Inherently, man is a social being and tends toward a herd animal existence. Man's superior intelligence allows him to survive, and in groups he can remain atop the food chain, but as a solitary creature, he does not stand in such esteem; joining together and forming groups is a natural progression for protection and survival. The State of Nature is the human condition absent from any structures or social order. It is the state where man would exist if he did exist in groups or have any sort of social order. It is the natural condition of existence that gives a person the ability to conduct one's life as one best sees fit without the free from the interference of others; in some senses, this state could be considered anarchy as there is no defined social order.

As the inherent nature of man is to be social, it can be argued that this state can only exist in a theoretical context; David Hume states, "'Tis utterly impossible for men to remain any considerable time in that savage condition, which precedes society... (Wikipedia, " State of Nature").

Rousseau postulates: The State of Nature was a peaceful and quixotic time. People lived solitary, uncomplicated lives. Their few needs were easily satisfied by nature... As time passed, however, humanity faced certain changes.

As the overall population increased, the means by which people could satisfy their needs had to change. People slowly began to live together in small

families, and then in small communities. ” (Friend) An individual’s actions are guided by self interest and bound by his personal power and conscience. Inherent in man is a “ shared liberty [that] is a consequence of man’s nature. It’s first law is that of self-preservation: it’s first concern is for what it owes itself” (Jacobus 58).

This is a primitive state that defines man’s innate ability to recognize and manipulate his situation for his best interest – it is “ he alone [who] can judge of what will best assure his continued existence. ” (Jacobus 58). Locke argues that everyone is equal to one another in such a state, and bound by the Law of Nature: the basis of all morality, given to us by God, that commands we are bound to the purpose of “ the preservation of mankind”. In this state, man exists as a solitary animal generally existing based on his own instincts and desires. It can only exist after man has left his protective family unit and chooses to live alone.

The social nature of man helps create the basis of social contracts and the general will that fulfills man’s desire for peace and protection. It forms the basis of governments and has been the uniting force that has helped shape the history of man. Man’s first steps toward a modern society begin with the social contract. This agreement is created by individuals to form a unified social group and consists of a set of rules that establish a method of protection and order. The social contract creates a new homogeneous unit with a primary purpose directed toward the good of all and establishes a general will. Rousseau suggests that there is a dual aspect of man that helps create this situation; the social contract is a deviation from the natural state of man and that he “ puts aside his egoism to create a ‘ general will’” that

collectively determines what is good for him and the society as a whole (Wikipedia, " Social Contract").

The chaotic conditions of the natural state force people to create a system of social order and laws; these agreements are done through a succession of social contracts. He also states that there is a symbiotic relationship between the people and their government: the people collectively define the government and the " laws that govern [the] people help mold their character" (Wikipedia, " Social Contract"). The social contract is a natural tendency of man. He has an advanced intelligence and understands his situation to it's fullest capacity. It is natural for man to collect in groups and form alliances that benefit his best interest: usually protection and survival.

The notion of general will is the philosophical concept that describes the collective interest of a people as a whole - society is guided and unified by it. It defines the basis of laws and establishes political legitimacy as it allows a collective to act as a unified body that is " directed towards their common preservation and general well-being"; general will speaks to the good of the society as a whole (Rousseau 90). As a group, Rousseau suggests, that legitimate political authority, comes only from a social contract agreed upon by all citizens for their mutual preservation. General will is a concept that human beings inherently understand and try to implement.

As social creatures they naturally form groups and assume that their own best interest is the same as others. Man begins his life in a social contract with his mother, as a result a social contract is intrinsic to his nature as its been instilled since birth. In this capacity he learns to understand and accept

general will as its integral for his own survival. Individual agendas and complexities of situations change these desires and tend to present problems, but ultimately, political struggles and ideological battles wage over dissenting notions of general will and what is best for all. A private individual may temporarily have the same interests as the general will, but will not share the community's interests in all circumstances. As a result, sovereignty is absolute and the sovereign cannot be represented by anything other than itself.

Sovereignty is also indivisible: general will must represent the interests of all citizens. Rousseau argues that there is an important distinction to be made between the general will and the collection of individual wills: “ There is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will. The latter looks only to the common interest; the former considers private interest and is only a sum of private wills. (Rousseau 146). It can be argued that general will is the natural tendency of all free men who live in a non-primitive state. One must understand that man tends to assume that everyone shares the same agenda and motivations.

At times man can also ignore his moral compass and find motivations that are self serving. In certain situations, man can impose his will and enforce general will as others have no choice or recourse; technically this is not general will even though the entirety can assemble as a unified force. General will is an ideological concept that can only work in small groups with simple concepts such as basic survival and protection. It would be hard to imagine that general will could exist among the masses.

In a simple existence man begins in a state of nature that exists only after he's broken the social contract he's formed with his parents. As he chooses to collect in groups and form a society he begins to form social contracts with others and create a general will. General will is the ideological basis of all modern governments and represents a large progression from his primitive origins.