

RI#1

Social 30-2: Ideology in History

Over the centuries, there have been many people who have thought, talked, and written about ideologies. Some of these people have had a more profound impact on future generations than others. Plato, for instance, is still one of the most influential philosophers of Western thought—even more than 2000 years after his death! In this section we will look at three other philosophers who have had profound impacts on shaping Western ideologies: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. These men were writers during the Enlightenment, which was a period from the late 17th through the 18th centuries in Europe when the recognition of human reason made human authorship of solutions to human problems seem possible. Western democratic ideas about equality, freedom, and participatory government came out of this time period.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)

- Thomas Hobbes was an English philosopher living during the English Civil War.
- The war was a bitter struggle between the king and Parliament that ended when King Charles I was beheaded.
- After that, a republic was formed under Oliver Cromwell, a strict Puritan, whose government tyrannized the people and brutally punished anyone who disagreed with its policies.
- He believed that human nature is characterized by fear, violence, and dangerous self-interest
- He **feared extreme individualism**—where people are looking out only for themselves and hurting anyone who gets in their way.

During the state of nature, people are in that condition which is called war...In such condition there is no place for industry...no culture of the earth...no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

- Hobbes believed that if everyone is free, then everyone is in danger, and that we all need security more than we need freedom.
- Hobbes's solution was a society where everyone gave up his or her freedom to one person (a monarch or a dictator) who was responsible for everyone's security.
- Quite simply, Hobbes did not think it was possible to have both freedom and security.
- **Hobbes = People are inherently bad, thus supports collectivism**
- **Left wing, right wing, or centre?**

John Locke (1632–1704)

- John Locke, another English philosopher, had a very different view of human nature.
- Unlike Hobbes, he believed that people are rational, intelligent, and reasonable.
- Most people living at the time believed that power rested with God and the king (who was chosen by God to rule and therefore had absolute power, a doctrine known as the divine right of kings).
- Locke, on the contrary, believed that the source of power was people themselves, which was a revolutionary idea in the 17th century.
- He believed that individuals possess the ability to be reasonable and make rational decisions.
- Locke further believed that the only reason governments exist is to protect life, liberty, and property, which is why people give up their natural state of freedom to enter into a civil society.
- However, Locke believed that **any government action had to be justified by popular consent**. Take, for example, what Locke said about taxation:

The government is allowed to tax the people, but it must be with his own consent—i.e., the consent of the majority, giving it either by themselves or their representatives chosen by them; for if any one shall claim a power to lay and levy taxes on the people by his own authority, and without such consent of the people, he thereby invades the fundamental law of property, and subverts the end of government.

- The notion of popular consent is what sets Locke apart from most thinkers of his time.
- In essence, Locke believed in democracy, which is why his theories were used by American revolutionaries almost 100 years later as the basis for their new government.
- **Locke = people are inherently good, thus supports individualism with democracy**
- **Left wing, right wing, or centre?**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a Swiss philosopher who spent much of his adult life in France.
- He was very interested in the common good.
- He believed that people are inherently good and have been corrupted by civilization and society.
- Another important Enlightenment thinker, Rousseau's friend Denis Diderot, expressed a similar view: "It is not human nature we should accuse but the despicable conventions that pervert it."
- Most importantly, Rousseau believed that humans are naturally free and are equal in principle: "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains."
- He believed that private property and ownership of land had led to jealousy and corruption. People had lost their compassion for one another, become selfish, and based their happiness on the opinions of others.

Rousseau was writing at a time when France had an oppressively rigid class structure, great extremes of wealth and poverty, and an autocratic government led by a king who proclaimed "L'état, c'est moi" ("I am the state").

- Rousseau wanted to strip humans of all those aspects that he took to be the results of the influence of society.
- He wanted humans to go back to the characteristics that were universal and unchanging: the characteristics that made humans good and equal.
- He thought that if this could be done, the most effective and legitimate forms of government could be determined.
- Rousseau's ideal state was one where the general will of the people was the absolute authority.
- Unlike Locke, however, Rousseau was opposed to the idea of a representative democracy (a system where a small group of politicians are elected by a larger group of citizens).
- Instead, Rousseau felt that citizens themselves should make the laws directly.
- Rousseau believed that if this was achieved people could enjoy a level of freedom close to what they enjoyed in the state of nature.
- **Rousseau = people are inherently good, thus supports full individualism**
- **Left wing, right wing, or centre?**

Each of these philosophers had very strong views on human nature and came up with an ideal form of government based on their beliefs.