

PHILOSOPHY FOR BEGINNERS

MORAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

**Week 9. Nature and Freedom
in Locke and Rousseau
13th March 2019**



Class recap

- Explore why states collapse
- Discuss the 'state of nature' and the 'social contract'
- Understand Hobbes' arguments for natural law and the necessity of obeying the sovereign
- Introduce Spinoza's argument for democracy



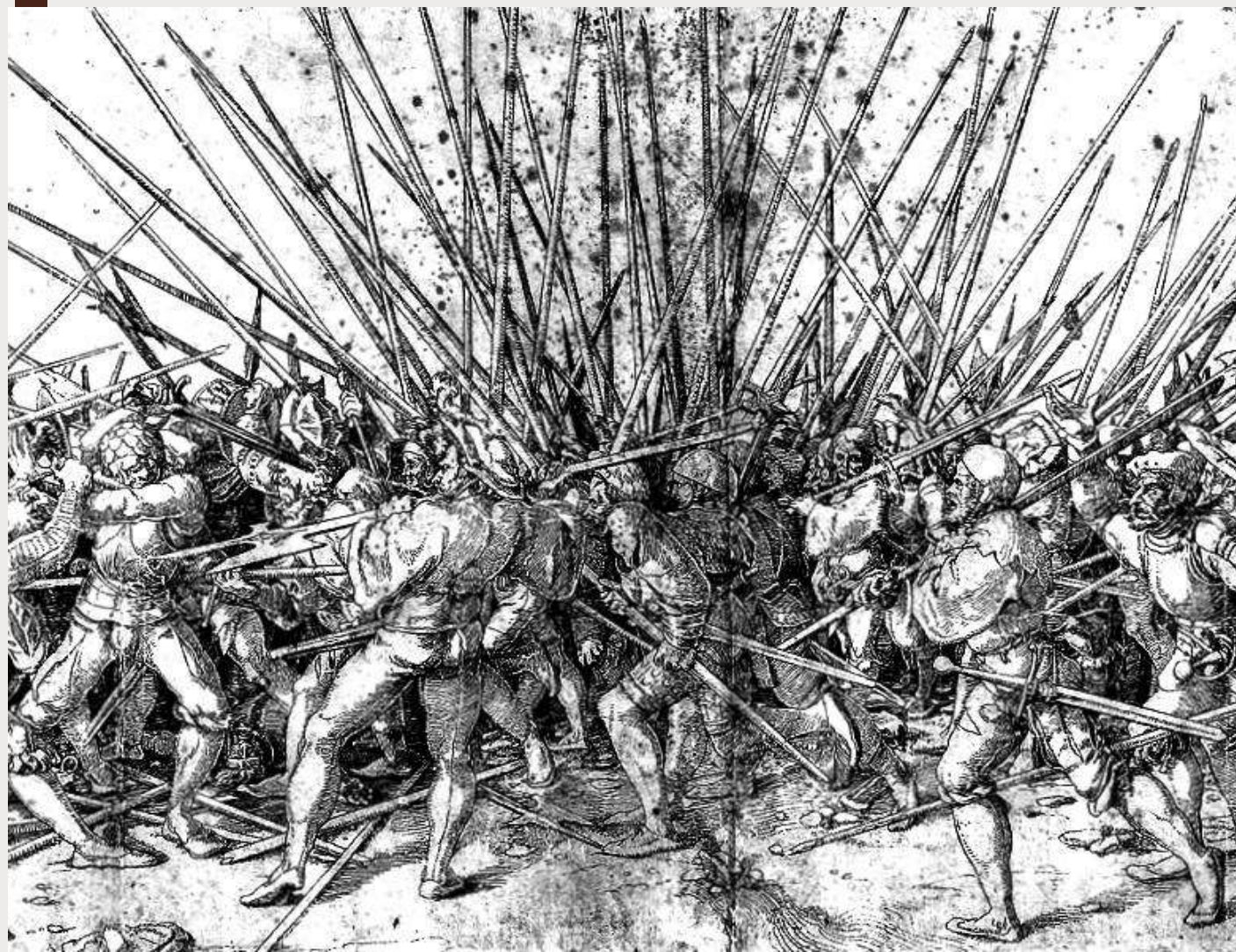






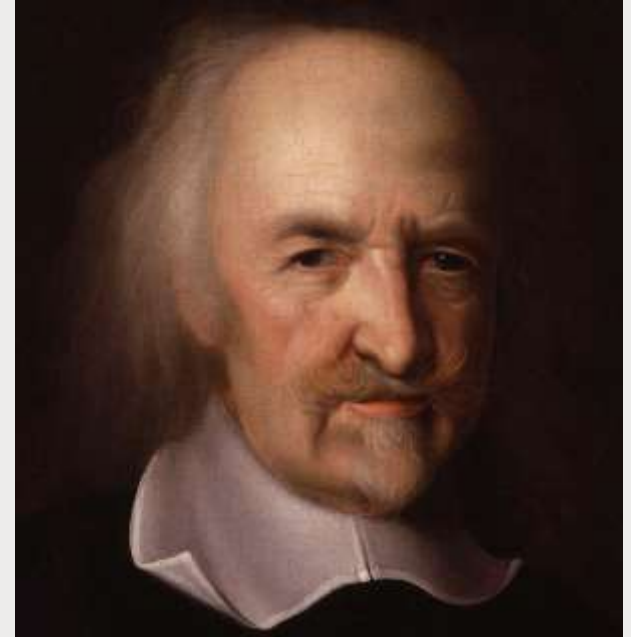






Why do we need government?

- Let's take a moment to recap and discuss Hobbes' reasons for supporting strong government...



Nasty, brutish and short

- In nature all are equals, pursuing their natural right
- In this free-for-all, the problem is the inevitability of conflict with other people's freedoms
- The state of nature would be a 'war of all against all', an ongoing civil war; there would be no civilisation, arts, or security because everyone would be living in a constant fear of violence and death
- There is no morality or system of law
- Hobbes rejects the 'natural law' associated with God's benevolence, being universally binding
- Instead there is just one law of nature, self-preservation



Social Contract Theories

- Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679)
- Benedict de Spinoza (1632 – 1677)
- John Locke (1632 – 1704)
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1788)

Class aims

- Introduce the liberal social contract approach of John Locke and the importance of property
- Explore Rousseau on the general will and the natural equality of humankind
- Evaluate social contract theories in sum

The State of Nature

- Social contract theory usually begins with “the state of nature”
- ... What society would be like without laws, enforced by a state
- Ask why we would agree to the formation of a State from this state of nature
- Grounds legitimacy of the State in this agreement, supplying a rational basis for the existence of the State

Social Contract Theories

- This state is violent, amoral and defined by self-interest, struggle and conflict
- It leads to the necessity of a *social contract*, in which people agree to cooperate and trade individual freedom for state protection
- For Hobbes it requires absolute obedience to a sovereign monarch, including giving up our right to free speech and religious belief
- For Spinoza and others following, it leads to free speech, democracy and liberalism



Locke (1632-1704)



- English Empiricist philosopher and medical doctor
- *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* criticised innate ideas and argued for tabula rasa
- Two ‘fountains of knowledge’: sensation and reflection
- *Second Treatise of Government* challenges many core Hobbesian ideas about the violence of the state of nature
- It has become one of the most influential texts in political philosophy – a work of Liberalism championing equality (via property rights)







The state of nature in Locke

- Let's turn to Locke's own arguments
- Take a look at the first excerpt and in groups discuss:
 - *what first features stand out in Locke's view of nature?*
 - *What does he have to say about equality?*

The state of nature in Locke

- Locke's view is very positive, but he goes further
- Take a look at the second excerpt now
 - *What laws of nature does Locke observe?*
 - *How does his view differ from Hobbes?*

The state of nature in Locke

- Positive view of the State of Nature
- Not one of perpetual war, but one of perfect liberty and equality
- It is not pre-moral either: there are “natural laws” and “natural rights” (derived from God, for Locke)
- Natural law commands that we not harm others with regards to their "life, health, liberty, or possessions"

Locke in context: toleration



- Locke's political theory is well-regarded for many reasons – toleration, natural equality, and democracy
- In the excerpt 'majority rule', he gives his arguments for the good of obeying the majority
- He was also one of the first to champion religious toleration, and the value of good education
- We leave the state of nature to realise our own good collectively, not through fear, but hope and voluntary consent



But what is the goal of society?

- Locke's political theory is regarded as a cornerstone of modern liberalism
- There is another aspect of it which he is the first to champion
- Take a look and discuss the material under “Why we live in societies”
 - *What is the importance of private property?*
 - *What strengths and weaknesses can you initially think of with Locke's view?*

Labour/nature = property

- One of people's key interests is the preservation of their property, which arises from the exercise of their freedom
- Property arises from “mixing” one's labour with the products of nature
- (In)famously allowed Locke to claim that native Americans did not own the land on which they lived

Property, society's foundation

- Disputes over property, rather than mankind's inherently selfish nature, will tend to lead to conflict in the State of Nature and, once started, this conflict is likely to continue
- Hence the agreement to form the social contract – but this is in the interests of securing our freedom, for Locke
- So far greater limits on the power of the Sovereign in this case

Locke and Liberalism

- For Locke, the legitimacy of government depends upon the actual agreement of people to be governed
- But this does not mean that everything that a government does from its formation is legitimate
- If it infringes on Natural Law and Natural Right (“life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”) then it is not legitimate
- The Sovereign should be constrained in turn by a Constitution which sets clear limits to the exercise of power by the State
- Influence on Jefferson, Adams and U.S. Constitution



Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-88)

- ‘Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains’
- All human beings are naturally free, but states subvert this freedom, demanding obedience and stifling dissent
- The people themselves are sovereign, and each person shares both a particular will and a general will – aiming at the common good
- The best state will attempt to realise the general will by guaranteeing freedom and equality

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-88)

- Rousseau was also a champion of people power
- But how far does this extend?
- Let's read and discuss a more challenging part of his argument now, that men should be 'forced' to be free...
 - *What is Rousseau trying to prove here?*
 - *What are the pros and cons of forcing particular wills to conform to the general will?*



“The Noble Savage”

Rousseau

- “The Noble Savage” – solitary, mute, leading simple lives. People possess pity and sympathy for others and are not war-like and acquisitive
- Criticises Hobbes for projecting the habits of “civilised” people (self-interest, greed, etc) back onto the state of nature
- Critical of the development of society, tending to make us acquisitive, jealous and unhappy

Locke & Rousseau round-up

- Compare the ideas about freedom and equality in Locke and Rousseau's political philosophies – *which do you find more compelling?*
- How might they apply today, e.g. Syria?
- How might we relate these to the moral theories of Utilitarianism and Deontology?

Discuss in groups of 2-3

Hegel's criticism

- Rousseau assumes that the world is inherently rational, once people listen to their own hearts over external authority.
- But it results in three key problems:
 1. it needs a new form of society that is generalising, and universal, and at odds with the particularity of the 'law of the heart'. In being universal, it is no longer the individual's own.
 2. Other people may not agree....
 3. Other people might prefer the old status quo and fight back, so claiming that status quo is alienated from the general will of individuals is false.

How useful is the social contract?

- Social Contract theory assumes that the rulers govern with the consent of the people
- ... But where is that actually the case?
- And what if we wish to rebel?



“Social security must be achieved by co-operation between the State and the individual. The State should offer security for service and contribution. The State in organising security should not stifle incentive, opportunity, responsibility; in establishing a national minimum, it should leave room and encouragement for voluntary action by each individual to provide more than that minimum for himself and his family. ... The object of government in peace and in war is not the glory of rulers or of races, but the happiness of the common man.”

– William Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*

Class recap

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Next week: Kant and Hegel's political thought