

## **BLOCK : II**

### **EARLY MANIFESTATION OF LIBERALISM: SOCIAL CONTRACT TRADITION**

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**Unit 1:**

Thomas Hobbes: State of Nature, Human Nature, Social Contract

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**Unit Structure :**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives
- 1.3 Hobbes' View on Human Nature
- 1.4 Hobbes on State of Nature
- 1.5 Hobbes Idea of Social Contract
- 1.6 Summing Up
- 1.7 References and Suggested Readings

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**1.1 Introduction:**

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In this block, we are discussing early manifestation of liberalism and social contract tradition. Hobbes's ideas are integral part of the discussion of liberalism and social contract. Hobbes is an English philosopher who can be regarded as the founding father of modern political philosophy. His vision of the world is strikingly original and his main concern is the problem of social and political order. The philosophy of Thomas Hobbes is perhaps the most complete materialist philosophy of the seventeenth century. Hobbes is also known for his ideas on Social Contract. Scholars have gone to the extent of saying that the Leviathan (1651) is the greatest masterpiece of political philosophy written in English (Oakeshott 1975). This book is a reflection of the civil strife in England following the execution of Charles I (1600-1649). It bears the mark of the conflicting situation prevailing in England at that period which must have influenced Hobbes in shaping his ideas on human nature and state of nature. Hobbes attacks implicitly or explicitly the three great current styles of political argument in England like Divine Right, social contract in its libertarian form, and the ancient constitution.

In this unit, we will make an attempt to deal with Hobbes' ideas of human nature and state of nature. According to Hobbes, human beings are selfish, mean and wicked in the state of nature. Therefore, he believes that human beings enter into a contract for preserving their interest in the society. Thus, state and politics are artificial creations of human beings for their survival.

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## 1.2 Objectives:

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This unit is an attempt to analyze the ideas of Hobbes. Hobbes is considered to be a modern thinker. He justified absolute power of sovereign as he witnessed forces of disintegration. It also made him to draw a gloomy picture of the state of nature. After reading this unit you will be able to :

- Explain Hobbes' views on human nature,
- Understand Hobbes' views on state of nature
- Analyze Hobbes' ideas of Social Contract.

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## 1.3 Hobbes' View on Human Nature:

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Human nature has always been a central theme of discussion of political philosophers as it is the base of all human activities. The depiction of human natures by the philosophers has always been a reflection of their time. As a thinker of social contract Hobbes also deals with the state of nature. In his famous work Leviathan we find his views regarding human nature and state of nature. From his writings it is clear to us that he considers the individual not as a rational creature but as an embodiment of passions, emotions and desires. Hobbes further views the state of nature, a period of human history preceding the establishment of the civil state are an extension of human nature. Now, in the following subsections we will discuss his views regarding human nature and state of nature in brief.

Hobbes makes the individual the spring board of his thought. The presumption of Hobbes is that motion of particles creates sensation in human mind. According to him, there is a relation between stimulus and sensation which leads to the occurrence of mental phenomenon as it comes into being as a result of the relation. Refuting to assign individuals a rational status, Hobbes states that emotions and passions are innate and reason is artificial. According to him, movement of particles either helps or stands in the way of vitality and the creations and aversions of desires depends on the movement. Each man desires something which will enhance his vitality and pleasure in the movement in his mind. Thus for Hobbes, what a man desires is good and what he dislikes is evil. He asserts that the conception of good or bad is not fixed or objective but subjective which undergoes change. In other words, according to

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Hobbes, human beings are highly self-centered. Every man becomes successful in getting his desired things. He also believes that man is self-centered and the desire for security is his fundamental need and this factor plays an important role in his theory. Each individual is solitary and consequently each one has his own concept of pleasure, pain, good or bad.

**Stop to consider:**

**Life Sketch of Thomas Hobbes:**

Hobbes was born in England on April 5, 1588. He was the second son. His father was the vicar of Charlton and Westport. He was brought up by his uncle. He was a bright student and mastered a number of languages like Greek, French, Italian and English. He was educated at the Westport church and then passed to the Malmesbury School. He was forced to flee to London after being involved in a fight with a clergyman outside his own church. At university Hobbes appears to have followed his own curriculum. He was little attracted by the scholastic learning. He completed his B.A. degree in the year 1608. His master Sir James Hussay recommended him as a tutor to William, son of William Cavendish who was the Baron of Earl of Devonshire. He became a companion to the younger William on a grand tour of Europe in 1610- 1615. He was exposed to European scientific and critical methods during the tour. His first publication was a translation in English of Thucydides' History of Peloponnesian War in 1629. He used to write verses in Latin and English. At the later stage of his life, Hobbes translated Homer's Odyssey and Illiad into English. In November 1640 he fled to France and stayed there till the winter of 1651-1652. During his time outside of England, Hobbes became interested in why people allowed themselves to be ruled and what would be the best form of government for England. In 1657 the Leviathan was reported to the parliamentary committee as the most poisonous piece of atheism. In 1647, he fell seriously ill. But in spite of his ill health he published his famous work the Leviathan in the year 1651. In 1683 the leviathan was condemned and burned in the Oxford University. He finally died of paralysis on 3rd September 1679.

Hobbes has very clearly said that no individual is capable of behaving independent of external stimuli. Again Hobbes believes that human beings

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are equal by birth. However, the desire to possess the same things brings them in clash with each other. He says that competition, glory and differences make people brute and quarrelsome. As all men are roughly equal and apparently desire similar things, there is bound to be war where every man fights against every man. In short, Hobbes says that man is essentially selfish, contentious, quarrelsome, mean, wicked, non-altruistic, irrational, impulsive and self-centered.

Hobbes's views on human nature are quite similar to the views expressed by Machiavelli. In the previous block we have already discussed the views of Machiavelli on human nature. Both Hobbes and Machiavelli spoke about how human beings are greedy and self-centred. Hobbes wanted the population to select one authority and pay obedience to that supreme authority. Machiavelli on the other hand taught his sovereign how the population can overthrow him and how to handle the population. The only difference between the two thinkers on this issue is that while Machiavelli does not assign any reason for the bad nature of man, Hobbes tries to explain it in scientific terms. In this way, we can see that Hobbes has given a very gloomy picture of man in the state of nature. He holds that all men are by nature equal. However, none of them is strong enough to be safe against others. They are also affected by the same three passions viz. desire for safety, desire of glory and desire for gain. The desire for gain leads to violence when the object of desire can neither be divided nor enjoyed in common. Naturally, in such a situation human beings develop a sense of distrust towards each other. This sense of distrust is evident from the situations when a man goes around against his fellow human beings with arms in hands, closes his doors against his neighbours etc. Thus, we can say that Hobbes' concept of human nature is based on two factors:

- All men are equal
- Man is not an idle spectator in political drama but always ready to struggle and achieve something noble, gentle and higher.

However, Hobbes' views on human nature have been severely criticized on the following grounds

- According to Hobbes, human beings are highly irrational in the state of nature. But he suddenly assigns human beings the faculty of reason with the help of which they create state. Thus, he contradicts himself on this ground.

- Hobbes has said that people are quarrelsome, nasty and brutish. But he has not given any convincing argument as to how they become peace loving and rational all of a sudden.
- His assertion that all men are equal also seems far removed from practical experiences.
- His ideas of human nature are not very convincing. It is wrong to believe that human beings are always nasty and brutish. In actual practice, people do not quarrel with each other unless they are forced to do so. Nevertheless, it can be said that there are desires which prompt men to fight with each other. Such desires have made man nasty and brutish in the state of nature and made him stand against the valid desires of others to satisfy his own desires.

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**SAQ**  
 Do you agree with Hobbes’ views of Human nature? Give reasons in support of your argument. (20+80 words).....  
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**Check Your Progress:**

1. Hobbes considered the individuals as rational creatures. (Write true or false).
2. Hobbes opined that individuals are embodiment of passions, emotions and \_\_\_\_\_. (Fill in the blanks).
3. According to Hobbes, the desire for security is the fundamental need of a human being. (Write true or false).
4. Hobbes believes that human beings are by birth unequal. (Write true or false).
5. Differentiate between Hobbes and Machiavelli regarding their views on human nature.
6. Mention the two factors on which Hobbes’ concept of human nature is based?
7. Write two criticisms levelled against Hobbes’ concept of human nature.

8. Name the first publication of Thomas Hobbes published in the year 1629.

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#### **1.4 Hobbes on State of Nature :**

After reading the previous section of this unit which familiarises us with Hobbes' view on human nature, now we proceed to discuss his views on the state of nature. Before proceeding to discuss Hobbes' views on the state of nature, we must remember that his view on the state of nature is only an extension of human nature. Hobbes believes that before joining civil state, people lived in the state of nature. According to him, the state of nature is in a state of war as insecurity is the only secure thing in the pre-state society. One is secured as long as the strong spares him. The life and property of the people are always at stake in the state of nature. In short, in such an environment, the life of man appears to be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. According to him, men have contrasting nature to that of bees and ants. In his words, "Men are continually in competition for honour and dignity, which these creatures are not; consequently amongst men there ariseth on that ground, envy and hatred and finally war." (Hobbes, Leviathan XI).

#### **Stop To Consider**

##### **Hobbes' Views on Absolute Monarchy**

According to Hobbes, monarchy is the best form of government. It is the only form of government which can guarantee peace. Hobbes in his works has always stated that there should be a supreme sovereign power in a society. In his Leviathan, he clearly showed his inclination towards supreme authority in a monarchy. He opined that the clashes in the society like between church and state, between rival governments, between different philosophies etc. should be minimised. These clashes lead to civil war. Therefore for maintaining peace, he wanted all the people of his commonwealth to submit to one absolute central authority. Hobbes draws a direct relation between obedience to the sovereign and peace.

The absence of any common superior to hold all the people in check leads to a state of constant war of all against all. The state of nature is characterized by perpetual war and fear because of three reasons namely competition for acquiring means for gratifying identical competitions,

the fear of being surpassed by others in power and desire for admiration and recognition as superior. According to Hobbes, unless there is a common sovereign power to regulate and control, competition, conflicts, clashes and quarrels are unavoidable. Again Hobbes argues that there can be no distinction between right and wrong in the state of nature because such a distinction presupposes the existence of common standards and conduct, a common law to judge that conduct and a common law giver. Again there is no distinction between just and unjust in the state of nature because there is no common superior (sovereign) or law. When there is no law there can be no justice. There is no right to private property in the state of nature because the possession of a thing depends upon the power of a person to keep it. Hobbes opined that man actually wanted peace. But his fear of others, his wish not to lose what he already had and his never ending desire to acquire more has created all the clashes in the state of nature. In short, in the state of nature described by Hobbes, there was constant fear, distrust and suspicion among the people.

In the words of Hobbes :

“I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a more moderate power; but because he can not assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more.” (Hobbes, Leviathan XI).

### **Stop To Consider**

#### **Hobbes Views on Religion in the Commonwealth**

According to Hobbes the sovereign must possess the power to determine the public observance of religion. Hobbes opined that religion is the only element which can validate authorities and hence can be a serious threat to public peace. Hobbes has found a way to counter this threat to public peace. He divided between the private belief and public worship. He opined that private beliefs should be politically ineffectual and public worship should be decided by the sovereign. Hobbes encourages scepticism eventually making private

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belief neutral. Hobbes wanted to establish that all authority comes from god and everyone should obey the civil sovereign. In the opinion of Hobbes, people are allowed to continue their personal beliefs until and unless it influences the public arguments.

However, Hobbes' views on the state of nature have faced severe criticisms on several grounds. To elaborate, historically his theory is not founded on facts and in fact he has himself not tried to establish the existence of the state of nature. Thus according to Hobbes, it is all imaginary and there is no end to the flight of imagination. Since his whole theory is based on human nature and it is a well-established fact that man by nature is not nasty and brutish, therefore, the whole basis of his theory and its super structures is wrong and not founded on solid facts. Hobbes in his theory has stated no standards to find out as to what is right and wrong to judge the actions of the people in the state of nature.

**Stop To Consider:**

**The Major Works of Hobbes:**

1. Leviathan. Hobbes' great philosophical tract is published in the year 1651. In this book, he has elaborately portrayed the conditions prevailing in the state of nature along with the description of men living in such a state. He deals with the origin of the state and nature of sovereignty and finally the creation of absolute, indivisible and inalienable authority of the sovereign.

2. De Cive. This book is a major work by Thomas Hobbes. It was published in Latin in the year 1642. It was published from Paris. In the year 1651, this book has been translated to English in the name Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society. This translated version was published from London. This book is known for its famous phrase "bellum omnium contra omnes". This means war of all against all. In this book Hobbes tries to establish the superior authority of state by saying that both spiritual and temporal lords should bow before the authority of lord sovereign.

3. De Corpore. De Corpore or On The Body is a major work written by Thomas Hobbes. It was published in the year 1655. This book deals with human nature. This work is devoted to foundational matters. So, the books written by Hobbes and their contents familiarize us with the major ideas and issues of Hobbes.

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It needs mention here that the political writings of Hobbes are influenced by the civil wars during that time. His writings supported the powers of the king. He was an ardent supporter of absolute monarchy and his writings truly reflected it.

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#### Check Your Progress:

##### Choose the correct option :

1. According to Hobbes, the state of nature is
  - a. A period of peace and plenty
  - b. A state of constant war
  - c. Regulated by the religious law
  - d. None of the above
2. “Men are continually in competition for honour and dignity, which these creatures are not; consequently amongst men there arises on that ground, envy and hatred and finally war.” Who said this?
3. Hobbes draws a direct relation between obedience to the sovereign and peace. (Write true or false).
4. Why Hobbes opined that religion can be a serious threat to public peace?
5. Hobbes did not make any distinction between private belief and public worship. (Write true or false).
6. According to Hobbes, under which condition people are allowed to continue their personal beliefs?
7. Describe the criticisms levelled against Hobbes’ views on state of nature.
8. When was the Leviathan published?
9. What was the main idea of the book De Corpore written by Thomas Hobbes?
10. De Cive written by Thomas Hobbes was published in Latin in the year \_\_\_\_\_. (Fill in the blanks)

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#### 1.5 Hobbes’ Idea of Social Contract:

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After reading the previous sections, we know that Hobbes is one of the famous theorists of social contract who has given a very gloomy picture

of the state of nature where the people are selfish, nasty and brutish and live in a state of constant war with each other. The basis of Hobbes's argument can be stated simply though the implications of the argument are far-reaching. Social contract imagines the societal situation that exists before the emergence of civil society. Hobbes terms the condition of men living without government as the State of Nature and paints a bleak picture of it. Men without government and the settled social living made possible only by the existence of government will be roughly and naturally equal. They can escape from it only by setting up a common power which is capable of restraining and protecting every individual at the same time. They surrender their rights to the will of one in the hope of getting peace and security. In this contract, the sovereign is not the party. Thus, whereas all are equal before the contract, after the contract out of all the equals one superior is created. All rights are transferred to a common depository. In this way state is created and the individuals surrender their natural rights which are assured by the state.

Hobbes believed that multitude of people cannot exercise rights and cannot act authoritatively. This can be done by individuals only. He opined that collective body is artificial. In the name of the whole group, one individual must act. Thus, he believed that a corporation is not a collective body at all. In a corporation, there is always one person whose supreme will represents the will of its members.

You have learnt that according to Hobbes, there is only two alternatives viz. absolute monarchy or complete anarchy. Thus we can summarize the main characteristics of Hobbes' idea of the Social Contract in the following ways——

- The parties involved in to the contract are individuals and not groups or associations of any sort.
- The state is based on reason and not on fear.
- The sovereign is not a party to the contract and cannot be guilty of violating the contract.
- The contract once entered is perpetual in nature. A lawfully constituted sovereign can be replaced only by a unanimous decision of the commonwealth. There cannot be any resistance to the sovereign. The member of the state can revolt against the sovereign only if he fails to protect them. Hence, for self-protection, the people can elect a new sovereign and give their obedience to the new sovereign.
- The minority has no right to object to the choice of the majority in

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the selection of the sovereign.

- The individuals surrender all their rights to the sovereign except the right to live. So we can say that Hobbes favours the system of absolute monarchy and supremacy of the king through his social contract.
- The sovereign of Thomas Hobbes is the sole source of laws. Moreover, the sovereign is also the sole interpreter of laws. He cannot be bound by civil laws. The sovereign is considered to be the creator of rights and justice. Both the law of nature as well as the law of god cannot be pleaded against the sovereign. It is because the law of nature is the creation of the sovereign and therefore only he can interpret it. Again, the law of god can be approached through him only. Therefore it is not possible to pleaded both these laws against the sovereign.
- The sovereign also enjoys the right to make war and peace with other nations and commonwealths.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. According to Hobbes, all are equal before the contract, after the contract out of all the equals, one superior is created. (Write true or false).
2. The parties in the social contract of Thomas Hobbes are groups and not individuals. (Write true or false).
3. A state based on reason is one of the characteristic of Hobbes' social contract theory. (Write true or false).
4. Analyse the circumstance under which the people can go against the sovereign of Thomas Hobbes.
5. The people surrender all their rights to the sovereign except the right to live. ( Write true or false).
6. Why the law of nature cannot be pleaded against the sovereign of Thomas Hobbes?

**SAQ**

Do you think that Hobbes' social contract can bring peace in his State of Nature? (50 words)

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You must remember here that the social contract theory of Thomas Hobbes has been criticised on many grounds. John Locke rejects the idea of state of nature propounded by Thomas Hobbes. John Locke was an ardent believer in natural right and the idea of life, liberty and happiness. Another set of critics argued that the concept of social contract is factious and hence there were no moral or political force behind it.

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### **1.6 Summing up :**

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As stated earlier, Hobbes is the greatest political philosopher who is credited for conceiving state as a human institution for the first time. His idea of social contract aims at creating an absolute Sovereign authority who can establish peace and security in the state of nature. In this unit, we have dealt with Hobbes' major ideas with reference to his works like Leviathan. Reading of this unit has enhanced our understanding of Hobbes' philosophy. Hobbes regards civil society as artificial, man-made and Leviathan offers us a message tinged with profound, gloomy and fearful conservatism. In this unit, we have also learnt that according to Hobbes, any man without a Sovereign is really an outlaw who can be killed at will. Hobbes idea of man as a rational egoist is based on his idea of state of nature. This unit also helps us to learn that Hobbes contributes to the utilitarian philosophy in the form of the idea that human beings enter into a contract for their own welfare. In the next unit we shall attempt to examine Hobbes as an individualist for the promotion of the interest of the individuals in the society.

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### **1.7 References and Suggested Readings**

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1. Mukharjee, Subrata & Sushila Ramaswamy. A History of Political Thought, Plato to Marx, Prentice Hall, New Delhi, 2003.
2. J.S. Mc Clelland, A History of Western Political Thought, Routledge. London and New York, 1996.
3. Gauba, O.P. An Introduction to Political Theory, Macmillan India Limited, New Delhi, 1995

#### **Links:**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Hobbes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hobbes)<http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/nature/hobbes-bio.html><http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hobbes/><http://www.philosophypages.com/hy/3x.htm><http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

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Natural\_and\_legal\_rights<http://www.merineews.com/article/hobbes-individualistic-and-totalitarian-both/15710957.shtml>

<https://thegreatthinkers.org/hobbes/introduction/>

<https://www.123helpme.com/essay/Hobbes-View-of-Human-Nature-and-his-13117>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De\\_Cive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Cive)

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**Unit 2 :****Thomas Hobbes : Natural Rights and Absolute Sovereignty**

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**Unit Structure :**

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives
- 2.3 Hobbes' Views On Natural Right, Liberty and Law
- 2.4 Hobbes as an Individualist and Absolutist
- 2.5 Contribution of Hobbes Towards Political Theory
- 2.6 Critical Appreciation of Hobbes' Political Philosophy
- 2.7 Summing Up
- 2.8 References and Suggested Readings

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**2.1: Introduction:**

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From the discussions of the previous unit of this block we have learnt that Hobbes is the greatest political philosopher who is credited for conceiving state as a human institution for the first time. His idea of social contract aims at creating an absolute Sovereign authority who can establish peace and security in the state of nature.

In this unit, we will make an attempt to deal with Hobbes' ideas on natural right, liberty and law. These ideas of Hobbes are inter-related to his ideas of Social Contract. He is of the opinion that human beings enter into a contract for preserving their interest in the society. Thus, state and politics are artificial creations of human beings for their survival. Moreover, we will also try to analyze Hobbes as an individualist and absolutist and assess his contribution to Political theory in this unit.

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**2.2 Objectives:**

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This unit is an attempt to analyze the ideas of Hobbes. Human nature has always been a central theme of discussion of political philosophers as it is the base of all human activities. The depiction of human natures by the philosophers has always been a reflection of their time. As a social contract thinker Hobbes also deals with the state of nature. In his famous work Leviathan we find his views regarding human and state of

nature. From his writings it is clear to us that he considers the individual not a rational creature but an embodiment of passions, emotions and desires. Hobbes further views the state of nature, a period of human history preceding the establishment of the civil state are an extension of human nature. After reading this unit you will be able to :

- Discuss Hobbes' views on natural right, liberty and law
- Analyse Hobbes as an individualist or absolutist
- Examine Hobbes contribution to political theory

Now, in the following subsections we will discuss his views regarding human nature and state of nature in brief.

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### **2.3 Hobbes' Views on Natural Right, Liberty and Law :**

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We have already discussed Hobbes' views on social contract on the light of his views on human nature and the state of nature in the previous unit. Now, in this section we will discuss his views on natural right, liberty and law.

According to Hobbes, before joining the civil state the people lived in the state of nature where they enjoyed full freedom. Hobbes also assumes that in such a state of nature none possesses reasoning power but is guided by impulses and passions. At that stage, he enjoys right to life and liberty but the only rule to enjoy the right is the use of force. Hence, in such a state one can keep with oneself what one has. When one joins the civil society he agrees to surrender all his rights to the sovereign except the right to life. Hobbes' emphasis on absolute and unlimited character of sovereignty is likely to give the impression that he does not concede any right or liberty to the people under the Leviathan. This feeling is further strengthened by the fact that he does not concede to the individual any right against the sovereign. According to Hobbes, freedom is a private pursuit of the individual. It means that each individual can create his own conception of freedom within a framework of state authority. Liberty, according to Hobbes, is whatever the law permits and on which the law is silent. Liberty implies absence of restraints and coercion. Hobbes identifies and safeguards the private sphere of the individual where none can exercise control. The only freedom or right which an individual is permitted firstly includes the freedom to do what the laws of the state do not forbid and secondly the rights which the individual cannot have surrendered under any covenant. Liberty in the

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first sense is not of much significance because it does not constitute any limitation on the authority of the sovereign.

Regarding the freedom of the second category, Hobbes allows the individual the right to disobey the state if he is asked to do anything which endangers his life or body. However, it will be wrong to infer from the above that Hobbes does not permit liberty to the individual under Leviathan. He does permit liberty, but his liberty is essentially of a negative nature. Hobbes justifies the grant of liberty within the limitation of laws and does not find any contradiction between the two. Therefore, until the sovereign interferes with the individuals, he can do anything, but once there is a clash between the individual and the sovereign, the former has to become subservient to the latter.

**Stop to Consider:**

**Hobbes' view on Sovereign :**

The sovereign is created as a result of the contract and enjoys all the powers surrendered by the people at the time of concluding the contract. He is not a party to the contract. The contract is irrevocable. According to Hobbes, the person to whom the rights are surrendered is the sovereign. He is the great 'Leviathan' before whom all need to bow. He is the preserver of peace, hope for prosperity, development and security. Hobbes' sovereign is not a party to the contract and remain above all laws. The sovereign enjoys the power to determine on behalf of the entire community as to what should be done to maintain peace and order and promote general welfare. The sovereign enjoys absolute powers to make laws and this power of the sovereign is not limited by any human authority, superior or inferior. The sovereign is empowered to distinguish between good and bad, moral and immoral, just and unjust.

In so far as the right to life is concerned, Hobbes accords it a prominent position in his scheme and permits this right even against the will of the sovereign. Regarding the other rights which individuals enjoy through silence of law, Hobbes refers to the right to buy and sell and otherwise contract with one another; the right to choose their own abode, diet, trade and life and the right to educate their children according to their liking. We can say that Hobbes concedes liberty and freedom to the individual but it is essentially of a negative character and is conceived in

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relative terms.

Again, Hobbes defends the right to private property. According to Hobbes, there will be no undue interference from the sovereign in the private affairs of the individuals including economic activity. The individuals will have the liberty to buy and sell and otherwise contract with one another. The state can provide charity for the destitute. But it is not the responsibility of the state to actively promote the 'felicity' of the subjects.

Hobbes provides the individual with an absolute right, namely the right of self-preservation. The sovereign cannot command a man to kill, wound or maim himself. This right is an inalienable right of individuals since the basic motive for surrender of their power is self-preservation. If the sovereign fails to protect the individual, the individual has the right to resist the sovereign. Resistance is justified only when the sovereign seeks to destroy the individual directly. These are the dictates of reason. According to Hobbes, the laws of nature are proper laws since they are delivered in the word of God. We should remember here that natural laws in Hobbes' theory do not mean eternal justice, perfect morality or standards to judge the existing laws. According to Hobbes, natural law is a general rule found out by reason by which man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life, or takes away the means of preserving the same. Hobbes argues that to attain justice and harmony in society, the law of nature must be enforced by some coercive power. In the state of nature, there exists neither any giver nor interpreter of laws.

Now let us discuss here the three categories of law as pointed out by Hobbes viz. Law of Nature, Civil Law and Divine Law.

- **Law of Nature-** The law of nature is considered as Articles of Peace. Hobbes argues that the most fundamental law of nature states that each person should seek to live with others in peace. He preaches that the law of nature stands for individual sacrifice in order to achieve social peace. He desires the laws of nature to be supported by swords as the covenants without the swords are words only and possess no value.
- **Civil Law-** Civil laws are those laws and regulations which have the sanction of the sovereign behind them and are also permitted by him. Their obedience is checked by the use of force where necessary.

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The civil laws are sanctioned and interpreted by the sovereign only and he is above all laws.

- **Divine Law** - Hobbes defines divine laws as the command of the sovereign. The divine law supersedes the civil law. But the sovereign is the supreme authority to interpret the divine law. However, Hobbes is of the opinion that the civil law or the law of the sovereign is the supreme law and it prevails over every other types of law. A custom becomes law if the sovereign feels that it fulfils the aim of collective social interest.

According to Hobbes, people have no right to question the reasonability or non-reasonability of the law sanctioned by the sovereign. Every rightful civil law passed by the sovereign is just. He can amend and change every law on his own. No one can compel him to either modify or remove any law from the statute book. There are no limitations on the laws enacted by the sovereign in the nature of natural law, divine law or international law. In case, the law enacted by the sovereign clashes with the categories of other law, it shall reign supreme.

#### **Check Your Progress:**

1. After joining the civil state the people surrender all their rights except the right to ——— (Fill in the blanks).
2. According to Hobbes, the person to whom the rights are surrendered is the \_\_\_\_\_. (Fill in the Blanks)
3. What is Leviathan?
4. What are the three categories of law described by Hobbes?
5. Write a note on Hobbes' view on Natural Rights.\
6. Why Hobbes' liberty is called the negative liberty?
7. According to Hobbes, international law acts as a limitation on laws. (true/false)
8. What is Divine Law according to Hobbes?

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#### **2.4 Hobbes as an Individualist and Absolutist :**

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We have already read in the previous sections that social contract theory depends on the view of individuals being autonomous in some important sense. We have also seen that to trace the origin of individual autonomy

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is a vexed question. In Hobbes's case, this difficulty does not arise. It has often been remarked how susceptible Hobbes is to the influence of the scientific and philosophical currents of his day, both English and continental. Hobbes has been carried up and down for his political theory which has been described as pure and naked despotism by some thinkers while the others consider him as the greatest individualist. The first view seems to be based on superfluous reading of the philosophy of Hobbes. In reality he is a great individualist and the theory of absolute sovereignty generally associated with Hobbes is basically the necessary compliment to his individualism.

As we have already seen, the rationale behind Hobbes' theory of ardent absolutism is the concern for the peace and security of the person and property of the individual which lends the tinge of individualism to Hobbes' theory. Hobbes does not talk about vague things like public good or general good and his main concern is the individuals who desire to live and enjoy protection for the means of life. The prominent position accorded to the individual by Hobbes is evident from the fact that he allows the individual the right to resist the sovereign if the latter attacks his life as the contract is finalized for self- preservation. In certain contingencies the individual is permitted to refuse to serve as a soldier as the service may endanger his life. Hobbes also allows the individual to withdraw allegiance from the sovereign who is incapable of securing his life. The right of resistance granted to the individual carries with it the right of the individual to judge for him when his life is endangered. Hobbes does not think in terms of common will or collective will. According to Hobbes, each one has left his freedom enjoyed in the state of nature only on the condition that his life will be secured. As soon as feels that either his life is insecure or the behaviour of the sovereign is endangering his life, the individual can resist the authority of the state and sovereign. Another condition under which the individual can resist the sovereign arises when the sovereign is weak and unable to discharge his functions. The individuals can also resist the authority of the sovereign when they are forced to leave the state of nature. They can join the civil state and accept the supremacy of the sovereign.

Here we must remember that the greatest sign of individualism in Hobbes is visible in his delineation of the treatment of the individuals. He believes that they are equal in knowledge and development and the rationale behind his support for absolute rule is the fact that as an individualist he does not believe in the idea of privileged classes. The absence of

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privileged class can be reconciled by the institution of absolute monarchy. Thus, according to his model, it is not anti-individualism when he does not assign moral as well as political functions to the sovereign and the state. Hobbes' State stands for public safety and he does not ask the state to perform the functions of looking after the well-being of the individuals. He clearly says that he wants to give the individuals sufficient scope for their development. Apart from these examples, Hobbes has made individual a distinct and separate unit throughout his philosophy. In his contract he has made individual and not group or family, the party. The individual continues to exist before and after the contract. Hobbes has made the state not an end in itself but only the means to an end, the end being the individual and protection of his life.

**Stop To Consider:**

**Hobbes' Views on Women:** Hobbes accords some fairly robust equality to women on the ground that they are sufficiently equal in strength. He argues that women are as capable as men. So they do not require any protection from men. The mother constitutes authority and guarantees protection to a child by virtue of giving birth to the child. In Hobbes' state of nature, every woman who has children becomes both a mother and a lord. But if the mother is taken prisoner, she loses her right of authority over her child. In that situation, she can select the person who will exert authority over her child in her absence. According to Hobbes, the idea of female subordination is a human creation. In the state of nature described by Hobbes, the natural domination of mother is accepted as it is she who can declare the father of her child. Hobbes argues that marriage is not based on natural ties of sentiments between generations. According to him, it arises from the consent of its individual members. Though, Hobbes is a supporter of equality of sexes yet he gives the father exclusive jurisdiction within the family, thereby defending patriarchy. While discussing the succession to the sovereign in the state, he wants it to pass from one male child to another.

It is evident from the above account that Hobbes' philosophy is pregnant with the strongest seeds of individualism. He makes the individual the centre of his thought. After raising the individual to such heights, Hobbes feels that if the individual is not kept in proper check, it will lead to the destruction of the civil society giving rise to anarchy. This will tantamount

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to return to the state of nature characterized by ‘war of all against all’. To check such a possibility, Hobbes feels the need of a supreme power which possesses the power to take appropriate action to prevent such a degeneration of the individual. Hobbes realizes that covenants without swords are simply words and he concedes absolute authority to his sovereign to guarantee that the covenants are observed by the people. However, Hobbes does not stop with the grant of absolute powers to the sovereign but also ensures that he is not able to use it for his selfish ends. He gives the sovereign the power to make laws or rules by which it may be possible to determine what is just and what is unjust; or what is good and what is evil.

The civil laws enacted by the sovereign are largely based on the laws of nature and therefore the laws of the sovereign cannot be absolute. Again the laws are made with the sole objective of maintenance of peace for which the individual surrenders his natural liberty. The sovereign makes the laws for the benefit of the individual and is subject to the judgment of individualism. Hobbes has assigned his sovereign the responsibility of checking the anti-social tendencies of the individuals without destroying their individuality. Though his sovereign is absolute, yet he has been characterized by Hobbes as the representative of his people. In this way Hobbes negates the right of absolutism. Hobbes grants to the individual certain rights and imposes certain obligations on the sovereign towards his subjects. Thus, from this discussion it is evident that Hobbes is more interested in the individual than the sovereign. Seen in this context, it will be sheer mockery of Hobbes’ political philosophy to charge him of absolutism. In fact, as Prof. Wayper has said, “he is perhaps the greatest individualist in the history of political thought.”

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#### SAQ

Do you agree with Hobbes classification of Laws? Give reasons for the support of your answer. (80 +60 words)

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### 2.5 Hobbes’ Contribution to Political Theory :

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The reading of the previous sections of this unit has helped to familiarize

us with Hobbes political philosophy. Hobbes is credited to have offered a theory of absolute sovereignty and freed his sovereign of all shackles. He declares sovereignty as an indivisible and inalienable personality. His theory forms the basis of all definitions given by political thinkers in this regard. Hence, it has rightly been said that Hobbes is the first political philosopher who stands for unlimited sovereignty.

- Hobbes is the first thinker to conceive state as a human institution. He clearly states that God has no role in the origin of the state. He does not believe that there was any mystery in the creation of the state.
- He is the first great individualist with his emphasis on the fact that the state is merely a means for the promotion of the interest of the individual. Hobbes has made absolute sovereign as a necessary part of individualism and both are combined together and made dependent on each other.
- Utilitarianism, a logical corollary of his individualism is another important contribution of Hobbes to political thought. Hobbes clarifies that people leaves the state of nature and joins civil society only because they want to gain something out of that. Unless the state proves useful and is capable of discharging its obligations, it has no right to demand obedience from the citizens.
- Hobbes is the first thinker to emphasize the supremacy of the matter in relation to mind. He asserts that matter affects the sensation as well as the whole chain of perception, memory, imagination etc. and in this respect he anticipates Marx. While developing his theory of materialistic interpretation of history, Marx is greatly influenced by Hobbes' idea of the supremacy of the matter in relation to mind.
- Again, Hobbes applies the true scientific method to the study of Political Science and emphasizes that all human ideas and social phenomena are derived from moving particles.
- Hobbes makes morals at par with politics and affects a complete severance between the two. Machiavelli is often given the credit of separating ethics from politics, but it is Hobbes who provides a rational basis to this separation.
- Hobbes repudiates the classical doctrine of the law of nature and advocates the concept of positive law. Hobbes proves to be a guiding genius for scientific legislation. He clearly states that it is the man-made law and not the natural law which matters most in all the legislation relating to human affairs. He asserts that only man-made law can be effective in human affairs.

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- Hobbes is the first thinker to conceive the theory of factious corporation. In his contract, the individuals surrender all their power to a person and authorize him to will and act on behalf of all the constituents. He gives the idea that the multitudes cannot act and that an individual alone can act in the name of the people.

Seen in terms of his numerous contributions to political philosophy, we can agree with Hacker that Hobbes creates a theory which embraces Psychology, Sociology and Political Science and integrates these into a coherent theoretical framework.

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## **2.6 Critical Appreciation of Hobbes' Political Philosophy:**

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In the previous sections of this unit, we have already discussed the major ideas of Hobbes. We have also assessed the contributions made by Hobbes towards the field of Political Science. He is remembered for the creation of a theory which embraces Psychology, Sociology and Political Science and integrates these into a coherent theoretical framework. However, Hobbes' successors have criticized him on various grounds.

Now in the following section, we will discuss the criticisms levelled against him.

- It is difficult to understand how the masters of Hobbes' state of nature become the law abiding and docile citizens of the society. The sudden transformation of the individual from savage to the civilized seems illogical.
- His theory leads to despotism, pure and simple and the individual is virtually reduced to the position of a slave with no right to resist the oppressive and tyrannical rule of the absolute sovereign. Thus, gross materialism, atheism and despotism of Hobbes fail to appeal to his contemporaries as well as succeeding generations.
- The so called scientific method applied by Hobbes has not been found practicable by the modern thinkers. They have found it difficult to apply geometry o the study of social sciences in general and the science of politics in particular.
- Hobbes' philosophy is mainly influenced by his personal predictions and prejudices. He is motivated by the sole consideration of defending the royal absolutism. Besides, he is wrong in insisting that common

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terror is the sole bond of union among the individuals.

- He represents secularism which is unacceptable to the church, the prime representative of theocracy. It cannot reconcile itself to the philosophy of Hobbes which thrives on elevating the state and sovereign reducing the church into a mere department of the state. The unqualified low position assigned to the church by Hobbes is a source of constant criticism by church fathers. Hobbes almost stirs the whole existing order and creates a sense of great dissatisfaction in many of the existing institutions including the church.
- The believers of divine rights of kings do not support Hobbes' theory of social contract as it makes the monarch a by-product of contract and not a descendant of God on earth. Even granting the monarch unlimited authority and powers do not satisfy the supporters of divine rights of kings. Thus, we have seen that Hobbes is criticized severely on various grounds. However, it is certainly wrong to say that Hobbes' political philosophy has not exercised any influence on the history of political thought. Hobbes is remembered not only a great thinker of the seventeenth century but also as a thinker whose influence can be traced in various schools of contemporary thought. Even his critics appreciate his contribution to political philosophy. We can rightly conclude with the saying of Sabine that, "Hobbes is probably the greatest writer on political philosophy that the English speaking people have produced."

**Check Your Progress:**

1. "Hobbes is perhaps the greatest individualist in the history of political thought." In the light of the above statement discuss critically Hobbes as an Individualist.
2. Analyse Hobbes as an ardent believer of Absolutism.
3. Give a brief account of Hobbes's contribution to political theory.
4. Examine critically Hobbes's Political Philosophy.

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**2.7 Summing up :**

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In Unit 1 and Unit 2 of this Block, we have dealt with Hobbes' major ideas with reference to his works like Leviathan. Reading of this unit has enhanced our understanding of Hobbes' philosophy. Hobbes regards

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civil society as artificial, man-made and Leviathan offers us a message tinged with profound, gloomy and fearful conservatism. In this unit, we have also learnt that according to Hobbes, any man without a Sovereign is really an outlaw who can be killed at will. Hobbes idea of man as a rational egoist is based on his idea of state of nature. This unit also helps us to learn that Hobbes contributes to the utilitarian philosophy in the form of the idea that human beings enter into a contract for their own welfare. Apart from being one of the exponents of social contract theory, Hobbes is also considered as a great individualist for the promotion of the interest of the individuals in the society. Besides Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau are also major exponents of social contract theory. After familiarizing you with Hobbes's ideas in this unit, we will be dealing with the views of John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau in the next two units for a comprehensive and comparative account of Individualism and Liberalism.

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## 2.8 References and Suggested Readings

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1. Mukharjee, Subrata & Sushila Ramaswamy. A History of Political Thought, Plato to Marx, Prentice Hall, New Delhi, 2003.
2. J.S.Mc Clelland, A History of Western Political Thought, Routledge. London and New York, 1996.
3. Skinner Quentin, The Ideological Context of Hobbes's Political Thought, The Historical Journal-IX, Great Britain.

Links:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Hobbes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hobbes)<http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/nature/hobbes-bio.html><http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hobbes/>

<http://www.philosophypages.com/hy/3x.htm>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural\\_and\\_legal\\_rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_and_legal_rights)<http://www.merineews.com/article/hobbes-individualistic-and-totalitarian-both/15710957.shtml>

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**Unit 3:****John Locke : State of Nature, Human Nature, Social Contract**

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**Unit Structure :**

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives
- 3.3 Locke on Human Nature and the State of Nature
- 3.4 Locke on Human Nature
- 3.5 Locke on State of Nature
- 3.6 Locke's Idea of Social Contract
- 3.7 Summing Up
- 3.8 References and Suggested Readings

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**3.1 Introduction:**

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In this block we are discussing liberalism and Social Contract Tradition. You have already got the idea that Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau constitute the most important contributors in this area. In unit 1 and 2 of this block we have discussed Hobbes at length. This unit will deal with Locke's views on human nature, state of nature and his idea about the social contract theory of origin of state. John Locke is an English philosopher and he is considered as the first British empiricist. His writings have influenced the American revolutionaries.

John Locke has also contributed to the growth of classical republicanism and liberal theory as reflected in the American Declaration of Independence. Locke's concepts of constitutionalism, toleration, natural rights, limited consensual, law based authority, pluralism, property have a significant impact in establishing and nurturing a liberal society in England beyond the English settlement of 1688. Moreover, his concepts are influential in inspiring similar traditions in America, France and Holland. The American and the French revolutions and the constitutional edifice in the United States are Lockean in spirit.

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**3.2 Objectives:**

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This unit attempts to deal with the ideas and views of Locke who has made significant contribution towards the growth of ideas like constitutionalism, natural rights and human nature. After reading this unit

you will be able to

- Discuss Locke's views on human nature
- Analyze Locke's views on state of nature
- Discuss Locke's views on social contract theory

**Stop To Consider:**

**Life sketch of John Locke:**

Locke was born on 29 August 1632 in a small thatched cottage by the Church in Wrington, Somerset, about twelve miles from Bristol and was baptized on the same day. Soon after Locke's birth, the family moved to the market town of Pensford, about seven miles south of Bristol where Locke grew up in a rural Tudor house in Belluton. In 1647, he was sent to the prestigious Westminster School in London. After completing his studies in Westminster School he was admitted to the Christ Church, Oxford. Locke was awarded a Bachelor's Degree in 1656 and a Master's Degree in 1658. He also obtained Bachelors of Medicine in 1664. Locke's political life started when Shaftsbury, the founder of the Whig movement became Lord Chancellor in 1672.

From the very beginning of his life Locke came in contact with Lord Ashley, who was the founder of Whig party. In 1666, he met Ashley for the first time. Within a year of the meeting, Locke joined Ashley's household in London. This incident proved to be a turning point in Locke's life. The Glorious Revolution was another potent influence on him. This influence was so significant that his whole political philosophy moved round it. His notion of human nature was an outcome of this revolution. Sydney who was executed for treason in 1683 was another influence on Locke. He stated that the authority resided with the people. Thus Locke borrowed this idea from him though he presented it in his own way and style. Locke died in 28th October, 1704 in Essex. All thinkers are influenced by their time and the surrounding environment. Therefore, a reading of the above paragraph will help you to comprehend the background of Locke which helped him in formulating his ideas.

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**3.3 Locke on Human Nature and the State of Nature :**

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In the first unit of this block we have learnt Hobbes' view on human

nature and the state of nature. Now in this unit, we shall discuss Locke's ideas on Human nature and the State of Nature. Different political thinkers are influenced by the philosophies and ideas of their predecessors. In Block I of this paper, we have learnt how the ideas of Aristotle are shaped by the ideas of his predecessor Plato. In the arena of Social Contract theory also, it is found that Locke's ideas are influenced by Hobbes. Hence it is easy for us to read Locke's Second Treatise of Civil Government (1681–3) as a straight attack on Hobbes. The most famous sentence in the Second Treatise of Civil Government is that 'though this (the State of Nature) be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence'.

Like Hobbes, Locke begins with a hypothetical State of Nature, gives an account of it, and then proceeds to show how men come out of it. Locke's State of Nature differs from Hobbes' as for Locke, life is recognizably social in the state of nature in a sense Hobbes will never allow. Hence to Locke the State of Nature is a state of liberty. Here Locke means that men bound by Natural Law in the State of Nature will be able to recognise and respect the Natural Rights of others. In the following sections we will discuss his views on human nature and the State of nature.

**Stop to Consider:**

**Principal Works of John Locke :**

Locke wrote thirty five books touching all walks of life. His first works namely Two Tracts on Government (1662) and Essays on the Law of Nature in Latin (1664) were written at Oxford. His whole philosophy was based on the ideas expressed in Essay Concerning Human Understanding published in 1679. It was forbidden as a text for tutorial discussions in Oxford and its colleges. In his *An Essay Concerning Toleration* (1667) he campaigned vigorously for toleration. Some of his minor works like Second Letter on Toleration (1691) and Third Letter on Toleration (1692) were written in response to the criticism made by Jonas Prost. In 1693, *Some Thoughts on Education* and in 1695 *the Reasonableness of Christianity* were published. In the First Treatise Locke offered a detailed critique of Robert Filmer's *Patriarchia*, a quasi-religious attempt to show that absolute monarchy was the natural system of human social organization. The Second Treatise on Government developed Locke's detailed account of the origin, aims and structure of any civil government.

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### 3.4 Locke on Human Nature:

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Locke's depiction of the human nature differs from Hobbes' description. Locke does not offer a systematic account of his views on human nature and we get a glimpse of his views from the scattered ideas in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding and the Second Treatise of Civil Government. Locke believes that human beings are capable, efficient, considerate and basically decent. According to him, human beings are endowed with a natural social instinct. Locke does not agree with Hobbes that human beings become quarrelsome, savage and brutish for the sake of pleasures. He believes that people are essentially peace-loving and not quarrelsome. They are not always selfish and sometimes they are altruistic also. He feels that people always want to achieve the ends by peaceful and rational methods. In the pre-state civil society, goodwill, mutual understanding and sense of mutual cooperation prevail and govern their social relations. However, like Hobbes, Locke also considers all human beings as equal. He stresses on the point that all human beings are born equal, if not physically than morally.

#### **Stop to Consider**

##### **Locke and The Glorious Revolution**

The most acclaimed work of Locke, 'Second Treatise' is influenced by the revolutions against the English throne during that time. Locke was said to be the apostle of revolution and his 'Second Treatise' justifies revolution. But thinker like Haslett has opposed this view. He opined that the 'Second Treatise' could have been written before the accession of king William to the throne. Cranston, on the other hand believes that the text was written 10 years before the Glorious Revolution. This was written to justify or create the arguments for the revolution.

Locke believes that every individual enjoys certain natural rights viz. right of life, liberty and property. His enjoyment of these rights springs not from any position, strength, wealth etc. but from the fact that he is a human being and possesses reason. He stresses that these rights should be respected. Children do not enjoy these rights as they lack developed mind. Locke has also said that everyone is bound by duty to obey moral and natural laws. It is the duty of the state to protect indefensible rights. Locke has made it clear that every human being wants to substitute his pain with pleasure. Things which we consider good give us pleasure whereas those termed evil lead to pain. According to him, all human

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beings possess certain basic rights even though the rights may not be recognized. Locke does not agree with the idea that man is a centre of blind passions. He is of the opinion that man is a moral and social being. In his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, he has said that every individual is basically endowed with social instinct. Basically each individual is decent and socially capable of ruling himself. The people are not quarrelsome and want to lead a peaceful life. They are not always selfish but basically rational. In short, Locke assumes that human beings are basically decent, orderly, sociable and capable of ruling themselves.

### **Stop to Consider**

#### **Locke as the Founder Of Empiricism**

Locke is rightly called the founder of empiricism. He believes that knowledge is derived from experience. He strongly negates the concept of innate idea or principle as favoured by Plato. He opined that if truth is native to one's mind than observation and experimental enquiry cannot add anything new to our knowledge. According to Locke, the ideas are not nurtured from within. They are acquired from outside. He believed that experience give rise to various ideas. Our ideas are derived from two sources namely sensation and internal sense. Locke divided the ideas into two groups. First one is simple ideas and second one is complex ideas. The simple ideas are derived either from sensation or from reflection. The complex ideas are derived from a combination of the first. The mind of man can be resembled with an empty page. Experience writes upon it. In Locke's view, the quality of the external object produces an idea in our mind. These qualities can be of primary or secondary in nature. The primary qualities are constant in nature and suffer no change. These are solidity, extension, form, number etc. The secondary qualities are the result of impact of some power in the primary qualities upon our sense organs. For eg. Colours, odours, sounds, tastes etc. These cannot exist without sense organs.

Locke's concept of human nature has been criticized on the following grounds.

- On the one hand Locke says that every human mind at the time of birth appears to be a clean slate without imprints. It is the world which creates sensations which subsequently get deepened. On the other hand, he has claimed that from the birth every individual has certain natural rights and these rights should be protected. Hence,

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these statements are contradictory.

- Locke has also been criticized on the ground that he has failed to give any concrete reason as to why human beings are sociable and good in nature since birth. He has also provided no reasons to believe that the people are capable of governing themselves. Though he believes in the application of scientific reasoning to the study of every problem, yet he has advanced no scientific grounds or basis for this. It has been said that each and every individual wants maximum pleasures for the self. He wants to avoid pain. On the other hand, Locke enjoins his people that they should struggle for maximum public and general happiness. It is not clear how a person, who is basically keen to achieve maximum happiness for him, can be expected to promote greatest happiness for the public all of a sudden.

### Check Your Progress

1. In which year Locke obtained the degree of Bachelors of Medicine?
2. Who was the founder of Whig Party?
3. Name two principal works of John Locke.
4. An Essay Concerning Toleration was published in the year \_\_\_\_\_.  
( Fill in the blank)
5. What is the main content of the book 'Second Treatise on Government'?
6. Locke believes that human beings are capable, efficient, considerate and basically descent. ( Write true or false)
7. Locke advocates the concept of innate idea. (Write true or false)
8. Write a note on Lockean concept of empiricism.
9. Mention the criticisms leveled against Locke's idea of human nature.
10. In which year ' Some Thoughts On Education' was published?

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### 3.5 Locke on State of Nature :

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We have already mentioned that Locke's view on the state of nature is a logical extension of his views of human nature. He agrees with Hobbes that there is a stage in human history when there is no state and the

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people live without any controls and regulations. Like Hobbes, Locke does not consider the state of nature as the state of war of each against all. On the other hand, he considers it as an era of “peace, good-will, mutual assistance and preservation”. He conceives the state of nature as a pre-political rather than a pre-social condition. As social beings, people have lived together in perfect peace and harmony in the society. Locke also believes that in the state of nature life is not intolerable and there is no perpetual hostility. Peace and reason prevail in the state of nature as the fellow beings are socially inclined towards each other and have a mutual bond of union among themselves. The spirit of sociability and brotherhood characterize such state and all are happy, equal and free and possess the right to property. Thus, we can say that the life of the people in Locke’s state of nature appears to be different from Hobbes’ depiction as both offer contrasting pictures. Locke also argues that before living in the civil state, the people are living in the state of nature characterized by peace and prosperity. It is a state of goodwill governed by the law of nature. He again states that the law of nature is based on the principle of equality. Locke stands for the idea that personal liberty matters most in the state of nature than physical liberty. He further believes that though there is no common authority in the state of nature, the consequence is not anarchic. Locke highlights three deficiencies in the state of nature. These are:

- Lack of an established, settled and known law. Because of this lack, law can be interpreted by each individual in his own way leading to a confusing state.
- Lack of an impartial judge who can interpret and execute the law of nature without personal whims.
- Lack of an executive organ which can enforce a just decision. Individuals agree to enter into a contract and create the state chiefly to remove these inconveniences and uncertainties of the state of nature.

### **Stop to Consider**

#### **Locke on Political Authority**

Locke’s concept of political authority is based on firm and explicit moral relationship between the human being and god. He believed that political power should be derived from state where individuals are free to do what they are best at within the limits of the law. Locke opined that political authority is based on religious obligations.

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Religious obligation is the source of all morality. God has created us and it is our duty to protect the right of self- preservation. Locke’s political authority is a combination of power and right. He was not in favour of the idea of absolute authority as he considers absolute power as illegitimate. The fundamental idea of locke’s political authority is trust and if the authority violates this trust, the society is entitled to revolt for the cause of self- preservice. He was in favour of a limited sovereign state.

**SAQ**

Do you think Locke’s idea of political authority is relevant in contemporary world. Give reasons in favour of your answers. (120 words)

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**3.6 Locke’s Idea of Social Contract :**

We have already learnt that according to Locke, state is created by the individuals through a contract to remove some inconveniences and uncertainties of the state of nature. He agrees with Hobbes that there is a stage in human history when there is no state and the people live without any controls and regulations. We have also learnt that social contract is an extension of the pre-existing morality which exists in the state of nature. Locke stresses on God’s permissions rather than on God’s prohibitions that is natural rights before natural law. They become an asset rather than a liability, something men desire to keep rather than to give up. Restricting the Hobbesian natural right to a given number of natural rights makes natural right much more manageable, and, being manageable, natural rights can be retained within the framework of civil society.

Now, we must remember here that Locke’s social contract is a contract of each with all. It is a contract under which each individual agrees to concede to the community as a whole. The individuals surrender only those rights whose exercise introduce an element of distraction in the state of nature and the surrender of these rights makes peace secured. Thus the individuals surrender the rights to interpret the law for them, to

execute it and to punish anyone who transgresses these rights. The rest of the rights remain the same even in the civil society. There are certain important features of Locke's idea of social contract. These are—

- It is a double sided contract in which the sovereign is not outside the contract but forms a part of it.
- Locke gives only limited powers to the community. The civil community which is to interpret and execute law is as much bound by it as the individual is.
- The social contract of Locke is unanimous. His contract is based on the consent of the people.
- Locke's contract is enforceable on the present generation only. It is not compulsory for all the subsequent generations to follow the contract.
- After signing the contract, Locke does not dissolve the state of nature. Locke's idea of social contract is irrevocable in the sense that once people have entered into the contract, they cannot revert back to the state of nature unless the government is dissolved.

### **Stop to consider**

#### **Locke on Parental And Patriarchal Authority**

Locke made a division between paternal and political power. He also distinguished between parental and patriarchal authority. He believed that while parental authority is shared authority, patriarchal authority implies the authority of one single individual. A child pays obedience towards his/her parents till he/she is morally responsible. Hence this type of authority is temporary in nature. It is the duty of the parents to take care of their children and educate them till they become responsible. And the children pay honour to the parents and not obedience. And most importantly, when we say parents it includes both the father and the mother. Locke was in favour of granting equal rights to the mothers as well. Mothers do their own responsibilities towards their children. Therefore they deserve honour and respect from their children irrespective of the will of the father. He went to the extent that the wife can leave a unhappy marriage at her own will and it should not be dependent on the will of the husband. He also granted the right to property to women. But he laid the power of decision making in the hands of the husbands. He justified this on the basis that husband is physically stronger and the wife has accepted and consented to her domination through the contract of

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marriage. At the same time he put some limitations on this authority exercised by the husband. He suggested that the husband can take decision in the matter of property and of common interest. The husbands were denied right over his wife's life or fortune. Locke separated family life from political authority.

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Thus we can say that, social contract is a double process for Locke. Men therefore, have a right of rebellion, and perhaps even a moral duty to rebel if government begins to frustrate God's purpose for the world. In all events, the Lockean 'sovereign' is a party to the contract to set up government. Hence, it is clear from the above discussion that unlike Hobbes', in Locke's social contract, two contracts take place and he does not prefer absolute monarchy. We can therefore, say that Locke is a supporter of the limited form of Monarchical system.

#### SAQ

Make a comparative analysis of the social contract theory as depicted by Hobbes and Locke. (100 words)

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### 3.7 Summing Up :

After reading this unit you all have learnt that according to Locke liberty depends upon the necessity of pursuing true happiness and upon the government of our passions. Moreover, Locke's view of human nature is not so profound and as consistent as that of Hobbes. The state of nature, which Locke described, was thus in contrast to the argument of Hobbes, pre-eminently social in character. For him, it was not a state of constant warfare. Rather, it is a state of 'peace, goodwill, mutual assistance and preservation.' Again, Locke believed that men are by nature rational beings and hence they obey the law of nature. Regarding social contract, Locke is of the opinion that society and state were created in different steps. Further, according to him, government is like a trust which is bound to act within the terms of its constitution. In the following units of this block we shall discuss the ideas of another thinker of social contract tradition i.e. Rousseau.

### Check Your Progress

1. Locke considers the state of nature as the state of war of each against all. (Write true or false)
2. Which among the following is wrongly stated?
  - a. Locke considers the state of nature as an era of peace, goodwill, mutual assistance and preservation.
  - b. Locke believes that in the state of nature life is intolerable.
  - c. Locke's state of nature is a state of goodwill governed by the law of nature.
  - d. Locke opines that personal liberty matters most in the state of nature.
3. Mention the deficiencies highlighted by Locke in the state of nature.
4. According to Locke, political authority is based on religious obligations. (Write true or false)
5. Religious obligation is the source of all \_\_\_\_\_. (fill in the blanks)
6. Locke's political authority is a combination of power and \_\_\_\_\_. (Fill in the blanks)
7. The social contract of Locke was a contract of each with all. (Write true or false)
8. Write down the important features of Locke's social contract theory.
9. Write a note on Locke's views on parental and patriarchal authority.
10. Locke prefers absolute monarchy. ( Write true or false)

### Space for Learners

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**Unit 4 :**  
**John Locke: Natural Right, and Limited Government**

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**Unit Structure :**

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives
- 4.3 Locke on Individualism
- 4.4 Locke on Private Property
- 4.5 Locke's View on Natural Right and Natural Law
- 4.6 Critical Appreciation of Locke's Political Philosophy
- 4.7 An estimate of Locke's Contribution
- 4.8 Summing up
- 4.9 References and Suggested Readings

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**4.1 Introduction :**

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John Locke is considered one of the important thinkers of social contract tradition. In the previous unit we have discussed some of the important ideas of Locke like his views on human nature, state of nature as well as social contract. It is believed that liberalism as a creed began with Locke. Locke's concepts of constitutionalism, toleration, natural rights, limited consensual, law based authority, pluralism, property have a significant impact in establishing and nurturing a liberal society in England beyond the English settlement of 1688. This unit will try to examine Locke as an individualist. Moreover, this unit will also attempt to discuss Locke's views on law, rights, property, etc.

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**4.2 Objectives :**

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This unit attempts to deal with the ideas and views of Locke who has made significant contribution towards the growth of ideas like constitutionalism, natural rights and human nature. After reading this unit you will be able to

- analyze Locke as an individualist
- explain Locke's views on private property
- discuss Locke's views on natural right and natural law
- examine Locke as an individualist

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### 4.3: Locke on Individualism :

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From the discussions of the unit 3 of this block we have learnt got the idea about Locke's views on human nature, state of nature and social contract. Now we are now going to discuss Locke as an individualist in this section. We already know that Locke is one of those few political philosophers of his age who stands against the idea of his time and boldly expressed his political ideas. He is not convinced that the individual has no standing whatsoever and he is only an insignificant and subordinate organ of the society. On the other hand, he believes that the individual has a definite standing. Locke displays himself as an ardent individualist in his writing.

Now, we will discuss the main features of the individualist philosophy of Locke. It must be remembered that Locke accords a fundamental position to the innate and natural rights in his scheme and asserts that the natural rights of life, liberty and property belong to the individual due to the fact of his very personality. In the philosophy of Locke, individual occupies the supreme place and for that purpose he even gives the individual the right to resist the sovereign. In other words, to him the natural rights are prior to the state. Again, we have also learnt that the state is created for the protection of the natural rights and the happiness of the individual. According to Locke, the individual is the end and the state stands for preserving the rights and freedoms of the individuals. Locke believes that a state where the interests of the individuals are best protected can be termed as the best state. It is the foremost duty of the state to preserve, protect and honour the innate and natural rights of mankind. It may be noted here that Locke seeks rights and freedom for all men without distinction. Locke attempts to base the government on the consent of the individuals. He considers the government based on the consent of the individual as the legitimate government. The government will be regarded as illegitimate if it is not based on the consent of individual.

According to Locke, law can have no binding force without the consent of the individuals. Viewed in this context, he does not consider an absolute government or monarchy as the true government because it is based on caprice rather than reason. The belief in the individual consent also implies that people can withdraw their consent if the state violates its trust. Locke assigns purely negative functions to the state. It interferes only when the rights of the individual are endangered. Otherwise the individual is left completely free to pursue his moral, material and intellectual pursuits. As a staunch individualist, Locke cannot reconcile with the idea of assigning

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positive functions to the state which can lead to state intervention in the personal affairs of the individual. In his social contract, Locke has said that the state should confine its functions to checking the violations of the rights of individuals. It can only interfere when there is infringement of rights of individuals. Locke proves himself a great individualist by assigning only negative functions to the state. He has left the individual isolated and alone in many fields, particularly in his personal affairs.

### **Stop to Consider**

#### **Comparison of Hobbes and Locke**

Both Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were social contract theorists. Hobbes was one of the founders of modern political philosophy and Locke was known as the father of liberalism. Locke differs from Hobbes in the context that while Locke was in favour of a limited government, Hobbes favoured absolute sovereignty with no responsibility attached to it. In Locke's view, the power rested in the hands of political community. The community delegates its power to the government and the community had the power to overthrow the government if situation arises. On the other hand, the sovereign of Hobbes enjoyed unlimited and absolute power and it is inalienable. Locke has assigned the right to revolt against the authority to the people while Hobbes had completely denied it stating revolution as something unlawful.

Locke's views on property further confirm him as an ardent individualist. He says that property initially owned in common becomes private property of an individual after he mixes his labour with it or imparts a bit of his individuality to the common object. According to him, property in which individual adds his labour becomes his private property and none has the right to touch or snatch that. This is probably the best way to emphasize the importance and worth of the individual and Locke assigns a prominent position to the law of nature and insists that even the state law must conform to it under all circumstances. According to him, secular law cannot be above natural law. Thus he places the state completely at the mercy of the individual. Locke displays his strong individualist bias in his views on revolution. He authorizes the individual to rise in revolt against the state if it transgresses its limits or fails to carry out its part of obligation. He has also said that the state can be justified to the extent to which it can protect as well as strengthen the rights of the individuals. The happiness of the individuals or love for individualism is the end of the state. If the state fails to do so, the individual can revolt against it. Thus in Locke's scheme of things the state is reduced

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to the position of a hand-maid of the individual who rules supreme. A state should bestow and not snatch rights.

Again, Locke's faith in pleasure and pain, which forms the starting point of his philosophy, proves him to be an ardent individualist. He says that all the actions of an individual are motivated by the desire for pleasure and avoidance of pain. Locke therefore, concludes that every individual should be spared of pains and given maximum pleasure. So he has stressed on the pleasure of the individual and not of the society. Locke advocates division of power, because he is convinced that it is an essential pre-condition for the preservation of individual freedom. Unless there is division of power, it will be futile to talk about individual freedom. It is evident from the above discussion that Locke is an ardent individualist. In fact some of the scholars have criticized Locke for carrying individualism to such an extreme. Prof. Laski says, "Locke reduced the state to a negative institution, a kind of gigantic limited liability company". By assigning purely negative functions to the state, Locke, in fact, ensures the domination of the strong over the weak and rich over the poor. According to some critics, Locke does not pay any attention to the moral upliftment of the individual. But it cannot be said that his individualism has no value. In fact, Locke theory forms the basis for the development of theories of liberalism and utilitarianism which subsequently became popular.

**SAQ**

Make a comparative analysis of Hobbes and Locke as supporter of Individualism (80words).

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**Stop to Consider:**

**Locke on Revolution:**

Locke was in favour of Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England. He believes that people have every right to revolt against the government if it fails to protect their rights. He also holds the opinion that government holds power only for the welfare of the people. If the government fails to perform the functions, the people have every right to resort to arms and set up new government. The government loses its legitimacy as soon as it becomes arbitrary and exceeds its authority. But according to

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him, right to revolution does not mean encouragement for rebellion. People are permitted to revolt only when they have lost their patience and all the other methods have failed. Locke's support of Glorious Revolution is evident from the fact that the background of the Second Treatise is provided by the years of rebellion against the English Throne. It is also believed that the preface of the text has defended the philosophical and political concepts of the Glorious Revolution.

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### 4.4 Locke on Private Property:

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We have already discussed Locke as an ardent individualist and it is apparent from his views on private property. Private property is an age-old institution. It is the subject matter of many controversial theories both in political as well as economic fields. Locke firmly believes that the institution of private property is essential for the development of mankind. He believes that man is an entrepreneurial animal. He has right to own private property. Locke uses the word property in both broad and narrow senses. In a broad sense, it covers a wide range of human interests and aspirations. Conceived in a narrow sense, it refers to material goods. According to Locke, state comes into being to protect the natural rights of life, liberty and property of mankind. He believes that of all the rights, the right to property is the most sacred and the valuable one. He believes that the state must preserve private property for the happiness of the citizens. According to Locke, private property always constitutes an important source of joy. Locke's theory of property is a labour theory of property. He believes that God gives the world to men for his common use. People can keep the fruits of their labour with them as long as they follow the basic rule of not wasting anything. There must be enough left in common for others. He justifies ownership of private property on different grounds. Now let us discuss the grounds on which Locke has justified private property.

- First, Locke justifies private property on religious grounds. According to him, God has given mankind the appropriate means for making use of the resources. It is the duty of the individuals to develop the resources so that they can actually sustain life.
- Another justification for the retention of private property as given by Locke is that property is the result of human labour. He says that men put their labour by way of tilling and sowing the land. It is his labour which makes the land worthy of possession and converts lands into private

property. He argues that it is human labour which distinguishes private ownership from common ownership. Labour is the exclusive and unquestioned property of the labourer and by mixing his labour with a piece of land, an individual acquires the right to possess whatever he has made out of that material. • Social sanction and recognition from the past is another justification for owning private property.

- Another justification is that private property emerges in the society and continues to exist even today whether we like it or not.
- Locke has justified the institution of private property on historical ground. History has witnessed that people who do not own property, suffer under tyranny and people without property are deprived of their liberty. Hobbes believes that encouraging the institution of private property appears to be a valid guarantee for all kinds of liberty. He believes that private property is the natural right of every individual and the state must protect this right. Thus, we find that according to Locke the ownership of property is created by the application of labour. According to Locke, unused property is a waste and an offence against nature. Labour not only creates property but also determines its value. The right to property is a natural right and therefore, it comes prior to the government. Locke argues that property represents human entitlements. He states that the chief objective or the main aim of the union of human beings into a commonwealth is the preservation and protection of their property. The purpose of all government is to secure the material possessions of all human beings. Locke identifies property with society. He states that even if the commonwealth is based on freely elected representatives, it cannot alienate property from its subjects arbitrarily.

### **Stop to Consider :**

#### **Locke on Government:**

Locke believes that state and government come into being for the welfare of the people. According to him, the state should create some standards by which the individuals can judge what is wrong and what is right. The government should provide the subjects an impartial authority to settle down the disputes. According to Locke, the government should also safeguard the interest of its individuals from the outside agencies. Locke believes that government can be divided into three forms, namely, monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. He is of the view that limited democracy is the best form of government. By limited democracy Locke

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means that form of democracy in which power has been delegated to the representatives guided by the electorates.

No government can deprive an individual of his material possessions without the consent of the latter. The state is created for the sole protection of property. Therefore, no part or whole of the individual's property can be alienated without his consent. Locke also states that no taxes can be levied without the consent of the individuals. Otherwise it invades the fundamental right to property. Locke defends property that is directly acquired through one's labour. He avoids the issue of inheritance or transactions as gifts. Here we should remember that Locke divides the society into two classes with different rights viz, classes owning property and classes without property. Locke's views on private property have been criticized by many political thinkers. C. B. Macpherson sees Locke as a defender of unrestricted capitalist accumulation. Macpherson argues that Locke's views on property makes him a bourgeois apologist, a defender of the privileges of the possessing classes. Macpherson's arguments are challenged by Dunn, Laslett, Tully, Wood etc. They argue that Locke can at best be seen as a spokesman of agrarian capitalism. Locke's stress on the importance of labour and industry for higher productivity becomes apparent during the Enclosure movement. The Enclosure movement is a protest against confiscation of land without the consent of the individual owner.

#### **Check Your Progress:**

1. Locke's labour theory of property greatly influences Marx's labour theory of value. (True/False)
2. Which one of the following statements of Locke confirms that he is an individualist
  - a. The natural rights are prior to the state.
  - b. He seeks rights and freedom for all men without distinction.
  - c. He bases the government on the consent of the individual.
  - d. All the above.
3. Why according to Locke individuals enter in to contract in the state of nature.
4. Mention four grounds on which Locke justifies private property.

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#### **4.5: Locke's View on Natural Right and Natural Law**

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In the previous sections of the unit we have learnt that Locke believes that

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before joining the civil state, people have lived in the state of nature. The state of nature is a state of peace, goodwill and mutual understanding as people are peace loving and understanding. Life is not intolerable in the state of nature. The state of nature is only a pre-political society and not a pre-social society. Locke's view on natural law is simple. According to him, there are certain laws whose content is set in nature by God and has universal validity. By the law of nature Locke means a set of rules for human behaviour. He agrees with Grotius that law of nature is only legal in character but it represents moral and rational reasoning of the society. It is a conduct and code of rules which governs all people at all time.

Locke's law of nature is based on two factors

1. Reason
2. Equality of all in relation to each other.

Locke has tried to pinpoint as to how the people should behave with each other. By the law of nature he promotes equality in independence. According to him, it is everybody's birth right. For him, it is the pre-condition of natural law. Locke argues that all should be free and equal to act and think within the bounds of natural law. The act of people should not violate the law of nature. The violation of law under certain circumstances is decided by reason. Those who violate the law of nature should be punished by everyone. According to Locke, the fundamental natural law is that the human life should be preserved as much as possible.

The natural law as stated by Locke has faced some serious criticisms.

- The natural law has not been codified properly. There is no standardized legal norm for the codification.
- The natural law can be interpreted by every individual in the way he likes as there is a lack of an established, settled and known law. Hence, there will be as many interpretations of law as the individuals wish. Consequently, it will lead to a confusing state in practice.
- A law must have an accepted judge to interpret it. But in the state of nature there is no such judge to interpret the natural laws. Obviously, when people are their own judges, the passions are bound to rise.
- There is no executive power to enforce the natural law and that makes the law meaningless. Thus, we know that Locke conceptualizes rights as natural and inalienable. According to Locke, there are three natural rights.
- Right to life- everyone is entitled to live once one is born.
- Right to liberty- everyone is entitled to do anything one wants to so long

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as it does not conflict with the first right.

- Right to property- everyone is entitled to own all one creates or gains through gift or trade so long as it does not conflict with the first two rights. These rights protect our freedom to control our own lives consistent with the rights of others to do the same. Locke argues that the natural rights alone are solely capable of maintaining a harmonious society. Locke also opines that man is originally born into a state of nature where he is rational, tolerant and happy. In this original existence, man is entitled to enjoy the rights of life, liberty and property. Locke believes that the preservation of these natural rights is only reason for the existence of government.

**Stop to Consider:**

**Locke's view on state:**

Locke assumes that the state is composed of three powers viz. legislative, executive and federative. Legislative power is the most important power. Locke assigns supreme power to the legislature but does not grant it absolute power. People can curtail its power if it acts contrary to the trust reposed in it. The executive power includes the judicial power also. Locke assigns it the duty of enforcing the law and permits it to impose necessary penalties in accordance with the laws. Locke limits the power of the executive wing by making it dependent on the legislature. The federative power includes the duty to protect the interest of the community and the individual citizens in relations to other communities and citizens.

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**4.6 Critical Appreciation of Locke's Political Philosophy:**

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Locke has been criticized by many thinkers on various grounds. In this section we attempt a critical appreciation of Locke's political philosophy.

- Locke takes a mechanistic view of state and society which is not correct. The state and society are not institutions which can simply be created or destroyed by the individual at will. There are certainly more complicated motives involved in the formation of the community than Locke wanted us to believe.
- Locke's philosophy suffers from logical inconsistencies and he does not stick to any particular opinion. For e.g. at various times he asserts that the sovereignty resides with the individual, the community, the government and the legislature. At the very initial stage of his theory of social contract

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he gives us the impression that the individual and his rights are absolute. But a little later he attributes supremacy to the community as a whole. As he proceeds further he vests the supreme power in the government as a trustee of the community. And finally he asserts that the supreme power inside the government rests with the legislature. At another stage he even suggests that a single person can have supreme power of the executive power is vested in him and he has a share in the legislature. It is indeed difficult to make out what Locke actually wants to convey.

- Locke refers to the original contract without specifying the outcome of this contract- whether it is society or state. Probably to overcome this difficulty he envisages a second contract, though he does not make a specific mention of it.
- There is a clear contradiction of the denial of innate ideas and belief in inborn natural rights.
- Locke gives supreme powers to the majority and treats its acts as acts of the community as a whole. It does not matter whether a person is deprived of his so called natural rights by a single individual or the majority. Locke fails to realize that even the majority can be despotic.
- Again, Locke wrongly assumes that natural rights can exist in the pre-civil society in the absence of an enforcement agency.
- His theory of natural laws is also deficient in so far he fails to explain how and from where the law of nature originates and why it should be binding even without the power of enforcement. His views on law of nature are quite unconvincing.
- Locke after painting a very bright picture of the state of nature fails to give any convincing arguments as to why people decide to descend from Golden Age to Iron Age.
- Locke's theory of tacit consent is defective in so far as it contains no provision for continuity of consent and the contract once concluded is binding on all the succeeding generations.
- Locke has depicted the man of his state of nature leading a highly moral and civilized life, enjoying certain rights and duties. This is more of a picture of a civil man than a man living in the primitive society.
- Locke has been criticized for depriving the state of all moral authority and assigning it purely negative functions. He specifically debar the state from undertaking functions like promotion of education, morality, scientific and intellectual development. In this way his theory is contrary to the notions of modern welfare state.

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**Stop to Consider:****Locke on Religion:**

Locke is a supporter of religious tolerance. Locke believes in religious tolerance except in the case of those who has foreign allegiance. Further, according to Locke, the church should not interfere with the state affairs. The state should not interfere in the religious beliefs of its individuals. He argues that the state should not intrude in the religious affairs of the individuals except when peace of the state is threatened. Locke has assigned the civil magistrates the function of regulating religious practice for peace, safety and security of his people. He believes that church and state are two separate organizations and should be treated as such. He does not support religious persecution also. Religious tolerance is essential for human and national development.

**Space for Learners**

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**4.7 An estimate of Locke's Contribution:**

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In this unit we have discussed various ideas of the English political thinker John Locke. We have already read the criticisms leveled against John Locke. Though his views have been severely criticized, it cannot be denied that he is one of the most influential thinkers in the field of modern political thought. He is the first thinker to draw a distinction between society, state and government and to put them in proper chronological order. He opines that society comes prior to state and this idea is accepted even today. According to him, society existed in the state of nature and was followed by the state and ultimately the government came into existence to exercise the powers of the state as its trustee. Locke has contributed significantly to the political theory the doctrine of natural rights. According to Dunning, "the most distinctive contribution of Locke to political theory is his doctrine of natural rights". He stresses that the state stands for the preservation of these rights. According to him, state comes into being to uphold these natural rights. Locke also emphasizes the doctrine of supremacy of community on which Rousseau's theory of 'General Will' is based. Locke also opines that the individuals have the right to revolt against the state if the state fails to achieve the ends for which it is created. His views on the right to revolt are influential as the people of America and France have tried to translate his views into actual practice. Though these two revolutions differ from each other, they share common heritage from Locke. His ideas on constitutionalism, toleration, natural rights, limited consensual and law-based authority and private property have profoundly influenced the political establishment of England, America, France and Holland.

Locke is also regarded as the champion of liberalism of eighteenth century. In fact it is believed that liberalism as a political creed began with Locke. He argues that if the state goes beyond its jurisdiction, its authority must be restricted. In this way, Locke provides the basis for the development of the idea of a democratic state based on popular institutions and constitutional government. He also emphasizes the principle of consent of the governed and majority rule which form the basis of the modern democratic institutions. Locke regards the concept of separation of powers as an essential ingredient for preservation of individual liberty. His idea provides the basis for Montesquieu's classical theory of separation of powers. It can also be said that Locke's thought contains the seeds of utilitarianism. He greatly emphasizes the general happiness of the people which is later adopted by Bentham. While dealing with utilitarian ideas, Bentham adopts Locke's concept of state as a machine, but he brushes aside Locke's theory of natural rights. In this we can say that though Bentham does not follow Locke blindly, he is indebted to Locke for the basic principles of utilitarianism.

Locke delineates the idea of popular sovereignty which had a preference even over political sovereignty. In his set up everything revolves round the individual whom he conceived lived even before the state came into existence. There is no denial that his conception of individualism is much more ahead of the modern individualist. He can claim to have a place as the forerunner of modern individualism. Locke lays great emphasis on the principles of toleration and secularism. He for the first time reduces church to a voluntary society which can exert no power saves over its members. The state was expected to remain neutral in religious matters unless the views expressed at the religious meetings posed a threat to the peace and existence of the state. He gives a death blow to notions of divine rights and asserted that state is human institution. He does not favour interference of god or religious leaders in the affairs of the state. It is found that Locke has tremendous influence on political institutions of his own time and also on the posterity. French Huguenots, Tshe Dutch, Montesquieu, Rousseau were greatly influenced by him. The impression of Locke on the American declaration of independence is quite clear.

**Check Your Progress:**

1. Make a critical evaluation of Locke as an individualist.
2. Discuss briefly Locke's View on Private Property.
3. Analyse Locke's views on Natural Rights and Natural Laws.
4. Critically examine Locke's Contribution to Politics.

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#### 4.8 Summing Up :

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The political theory of Locke depends for their plausibility on the different pictures of the state of nature. This unit provides you a comprehensive account of Locke's political philosophy. After reading this unit, you are now in a position to discuss Locke's view on the state of nature and human nature. Locke's state of nature is different from the concept given by Hobbes. Locke considers human beings as the moral beings. He considers state of nature as state of liberty where natural laws prevail. Moreover, you have also learnt that Locke is considered to be one of the important social contract theorists after Hobbes. According to Locke, the social contract is a contract of each individual with all. The individuals surrender only those rights through the contract whose exercise introduce an element of distraction in the state of nature and makes its peace secure.

Locke has also discussed at length the natural rights and natural laws. According to him, there are three kinds of natural rights, viz, right to life, liberty and property. He also believes that the natural rights are solely capable of maintaining a harmonious society. In this unit, you have also learnt that Locke has contributed significantly to the growth of constitutionalism and utilitarianism. Rousseau's formulation of the theory of 'General Will' draws on Locke's idea of the supremacy of community. In the next unit of this block, we will be dealing with the views of Rousseau who is also considered to be an important social contract theorist. After familiarizing you with Locke's ideas in this unit, in the next units we attempt to give you a comparative study of Locke and Rousseau.

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**Unit 5 :****J.J Rousseau: State of Nature, Human Nature , Social Contract**

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**Unit Structure**

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objectives
- 5.3 Rousseau on Human nature and Private Property
- 5.4 Rousseau on the State of Nature
- 5.5 Rousseau’s Idea of Social Contract
- 5.6 Summing up
- 5.7 References and Suggested Readings

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**5.1 Introduction**

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Rousseau is a great political philosopher, educationist and essayist of the eighteenth century. He is also known as a great novelist, composer of music and a theorist. His ideas and political philosophies have influenced the French Revolution and the development of modern political and educational thought. The great eccentric Rousseau is a genius but he often faces criticisms for his conflicting and contradictory ideas. He is a staunch advocator of individual freedom. However, at times he also advocates collectivism. Many thinkers have viewed him as a precursor of modern totalitarianism. Rousseau criticizes property as the root cause of all evils and at the same time defends property in civil society. He also criticizes religion but refuses to assign any place to the atheists in his republic. The influence of Rousseau’s ideas can be seen not only in politics and government but also in education, literature, religion, morality, customs and manners. He paves the way for the great revolutions that take place within a decade of his death. Rousseau’s intellectual contribution to the world makes him a monumental figure in the history of political theory and through the idea of “General Will”, he contributes the idea of popular will and democracy to the world of political philosophy. In this unit, we shall discuss Rousseau as an individualist and as a theorist of social contract. Hence, here we shall deal with Rousseau’s ideas on Human nature and the State of Nature.

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**5.2 Objectives**

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Rousseau is an important figure in the history of political theory as his major

ideas of Individualism, Collectivism and theories of Social Contract have helped to shape the course of political philosophy. After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Analyse Rousseau’s ideas on Human nature and Private Property
- discuss Rousseau’s view on the State of Nature
- explain his ideas of Social Contract

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### **5.3 Rousseau on Human Nature and Private Property**

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In the previous units of this block, we have already discussed the ideas of Hobbes and Locke on human nature. The concept of social contract is an important aspect of Hobbes and Locke’s theorization of the system of government. Following them, Rousseau continues the discussion on social contract. While elaborating the idea of social contract, Rousseau deals with the concept of natural man and put forwarded the idea of ‘General will’. Rousseau observes that, ‘the first man who, having fenced in a piece of land, said “This is mine” and found people naive enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not anyone has saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: Beware of listening to this impostor, you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody.’ (Jean Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality, 1754)

Rousseau differs from Hobbes for asserting that man, in the state of nature is wicked. On the other hand, he opines that ‘uncorrupted morals’ characterizes the state of nature. However, Rousseau does not believe that human beings act morally in the state of nature. He further believes that the terms like ‘justice’, ‘wickedness’ are inapplicable to pre-political society. Thus, Rousseau is of the view that human beings, in the state of nature may act with the ferocity of an animal. Consequently, human beings are good only when they are self-sufficient and not subject to the vices of political society. In this way, the natural goodness of humanity, as defined by Rousseau, is the goodness of the animal which is neither good nor bad. In his Discourse on Inequality (1754), Rousseau traces man’s social evolution from the primitive state of nature to the modern society. According to Rousseau the passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man, by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and giving his actions the morality they had formerly lacked. Then only, when the voice of duty takes the place of physical impulses and right of appetite, does man,

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who so far had considered only himself, find that he is forced to act on different principles, and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations. Although, in this state, he deprives himself of some advantages which he got from nature, he gains in return others so great, his faculties are so stimulated and developed, his ideas so extended, his feelings so ennobled, and his whole soul so uplifted, that, did not the abuses of this new condition often degrade him below that which he left, he would be bound to bless continually the happy moment which took him from it forever, and, instead of a stupid and unimaginative animal, made him an intelligent being and a man. (The Social Contract, Chapter 8)

Thus, from the above statement, we can find that Rousseau believes that man, in the state of nature is equal, self-sufficient and contented. In short, every man in the state of nature lives a life of idyllic simplicity and happiness. In his Discourse on Inequality, Rousseau further argues that civilization has robbed the individual of the natural freedom and made him cruel, selfish and bloodthirsty. Therefore, he regards the human beings in the state of nature as the 'noble savages'. In the words of Rousseau, . . . from the moment one man began to stand in need of the help of another; from the moment it appeared advantageous to any one man to have enough provisions for two, equality too disappeared, property was introduced, for work became indispensable, and vast forests became smiling fields, which man had to water with the sweat of his brow, and where slavery and misery were soon seem to germinate and grow up with crops (Rousseau 1958: 199).

Now we can trace the connection between the thinkers as like Hobbes, Rousseau also believes that in the state of nature, the institution of private property is absent. Moreover, Rousseau also believes that the civil society has emerged to protect the property of a few and the institutionalization of property rights put an end to the sense of self-sufficiency that existed in the state of nature, thereby bringing misery to the majority.

**Stop to Consider:**

Life sketch of Rousseau: Rousseau was born in Geneva on June 28 in 1712. His mother died soon after his birth and his father deserted the family. Rousseau was put to school by one of his uncles. But he did not enjoy formal education and at 16 Rousseau ran away from home and for 14 long years he roamed around Europe. In 1742 Rousseau came to Paris to earn his livelihood. He became the secretary to the French ambassador in Venice from 1743-1744. In 1749 the Academy at Dijon announced a prize for the best essay on the question: 'Has the progress

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of sciences and arts contributed to corrupt or profit morality'. Rousseau worked on the essay and won the first prize. After winning this award, Rousseau turned into a great literary person from a non-entity. After that he wrote many books among which The Emile and The Social Contract have drawn great attention of the political philosophers of the world. Besides, his contribution to the field of Political Science, Rousseau also made significant contributions in other fields like opera and music. One of his operas, 'Le Devin du Village' (The Village Soothsayer) became an instant hit in Paris in 1753. A Dictionary of music written by Rousseau can be regarded as another notable contribution of him. However, despite the success and fame, Rousseau was persecuted for religious reasons. His two valuable works The Emile and The Social Contract were burnt in Paris as well as in Geneva. Rousseau went in to hiding facing the threat of imprisonment. He died in 1778.

### Check Your Progress

1. Rousseau considers man as wicked by nature (write True or False)
2. Mention two characteristics of human beings as pointed out by Rousseau.
3. How does Rousseau differ from Hobbes while put forwarding his ideas on Human nature? Explain.
4. Why does Rousseau regard the human beings in the state of nature as the 'noble savages'?
5. Write a short note on Rousseau's idea on private property.

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### 5.4 Rousseau on the State of Nature:

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After discussing Rousseau's idea on Human nature in the above section, now we are going to discuss his idea on the state of nature. Like his predecessors, Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau also begins his theory of social contract with a description of the state of nature. However, Rousseau's theorization is different from Hobbes and Locke although we can trace the similarities between them. To elaborate, Rousseau agrees with Hobbes and Locke that in the state of nature, self-preservation is men's basic drive. We have already learnt that while describing the state of nature, Hobbes regards man as wicked by nature. So, according to him, the state of nature is characterized by a state of war where men fight against each other. For establishing peace and security in the society, men enter into a mutual contract in order to surrender all their rights and possessions in favour of the 'Sovereign'. Locke, on the other hand, believes that the state of nature is a

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state characterized by peace and goodwill. But the inconveniences in the state of nature prompt people to enter into a contract for an orderly living. Again, we have found that Hobbes believes that society is the corrupting force that transforms 'natural man' into a wicked man. Rousseau argues that Hobbes has failed to define the state of nature correctly. According to Rousseau, in the state of nature a man will be like a savage whose actions are primarily determined by immediate needs like the desire for food, sexual satisfaction and sleep. In such a state of nature man fears only hunger and pain. Rousseau considers the savage as the solitary animal and for him 'State of Nature' is much more than just a removal of government. To him, it also includes removal of all the cultural aspects like beliefs, languages etc. In such a situation, Rousseau believes that self-love and pity are the only sentiments that characterize and remain in our nature. So, we find that according to Rousseau, human beings possess positive qualities in the state of nature and all the negative aspects of human nature are the result of the interaction with the society. He, therefore, views society as 'artificial' and 'corrupt' and argues that the furthering of the society results in the continuing unhappiness of humankind.

Rousseau also opines that the progress of knowledge has made governments more powerful leading to the consequent loss of individual liberty. Thus, Rousseau points out a fundamental division between society and human nature. According to him, human beings are good because they are self-sufficient and the vices of the society fail to affect them. He also thinks that the development of the society, especially the growth of social interdependence, has been inimical to the well-being of the human society. Hence, it is clear to us that, according to Rousseau, men are free in the state of nature and enjoy all rights incidental to their persons.

**Stop to Consider :**

**Major works of Rousseau:**

1. The Discourse on the Sciences and Arts, 1750
2. The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, 1755
3. The Discourse on Political Economy, 1755
4. Julie or the New Heloise, 1761
5. The Emile or on Education, 1762
6. The Social Contract, 1762
7. The Confessions (Rousseau's Autobiography), Part I, 1782 and Part II, 1789
8. Reveries of the Solitary Worker, 1782
9. Judge of Jean Jacques, 1782

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Rousseau's idea of the state of nature is similar to Locke's idea. According to Rousseau, the natural man leads a life of idyllic simplicity and unrestricted freedom. He believes that the state of nature is pre-social and pre-political. The natural man lives in isolation until his instincts prompt him to seek the company of others. In that sense, he is non-social and amoral. The natural man is, therefore, neither good nor bad, neither happy nor unhappy, neither evil nor virtuous. Like Hobbes, Rousseau also believes that the natural man is guided by a primary need and compulsion of life, namely self-preservation. Rousseau further considers self-interest and sympathy as the two instincts that enable the natural man to satisfy his needs. In this way, Rousseau idealizes man in the state of nature as a 'noble savage'. Thus, Rousseau believes that these noble savages were equal. At the same time, he did not rule out the possibility of having inequalities among them. However, these inequalities do not hinder the independence and self-sufficiency of human beings as they continue to lead free, healthy, honest and happy lives. Rousseau's idealization of man as 'noble savage' invites attention to the reasons behind man's rejection of the state of nature in spite of the promise of liberty and happiness.

Rousseau believes that the fury of nature translated in the calamities like flood, cyclone or earthquake instills a sense of insecurity in man. Besides, the increase in population leads to various other problems. Consequently, in such a situation, man's sense of self-dependence is diminished when he starts seeking the company of others. Family is the first of the social institutions that comes into existence. With the establishment of family, economic needs also arise leading to the emergence of the concept like private property. Rousseau, therefore, opines that, 'the first man who enclosed a plot of ground and bethought himself saying "this is mine" and found others foolish enough to believe him was the true founder of civil society'.

Regarding the consequences of private property, Rousseau again says that, "Such was or may well have been the origin of society or law, which bound new fetters on the poor, and gave new powers to the rich, which irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, eternally fixed the law of property and inequality, converted clever usurpation into unalterable right and for the advantage of a few ambitious individuals and subjected all mankind to perpetual labour, slavery and wretchedness". Thus, Rousseau believes that in the state of nature, individual is guided by instinct and not by reason. The life of the individuals in the state of nature is different as the former possessed a will and a desire for perfection. Like Hobbes, Rousseau believes that man in the state of nature is guided by the primary need and desire for self-preservation.

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Rousseau does not view reason as the innate quality of the individuals. He also believes that the natural man is able to fulfill his needs without much assistance from reason. Reason for Rousseau is an instrument to attain ends, and if one's ends are satisfied effortlessly, then it plays a marginal role. In the state of nature, human beings have limited desires. However, the moment individuals start reasoning, his range of desires also increases. Since happiness is dependent on the satisfaction of desires, consequently the rational individuals become unhappy. Under such circumstances the natural persons cease to be happy and his life becomes miserable where both natural equality and innocence of the individual is lost.

Rousseau therefore says that, Reason is what engenders egocentrism and reflection strengthens it. Reason is what turns man in upon himself. ...Philosophy is what isolates him and what moves him to say in secret at the sight of a suffering man, "Perish if you will; I am safe and sound" (Rousseau, 1958). Rousseau also strongly believes that it is impossible for human beings to go back to the state of nature once society, family and private property come to stay. Therefore, according to him, the problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect the whole common force, the person and goods of each associate. In such an association, an individual uniting himself with all may still obey himself alone and remain as free as ever. In other words, the existing social order known for its inequality and exploitation should be replaced by a new social order in which the community resulting from a voluntary social contract can be strong enough to assure every member both liberty and equality in much greater measure than what he possesses in the state of nature.

Further, Rousseau believes that in the state of nature, human beings are healthy, good and almost equal to each other. But later, they become evil, corrupt and unequal. Thus, Rousseau envisages two stages of the state of nature namely, the pre-property state and the post-property state. While the pre-property state of nature is an ideal stage, the post-property state of nature is wretched.

**Stop to Consider:**

**Rousseau as an Enlightenment thinker :**

Rousseau belongs to the age of Enlightenment which is also known as the Age of Reason. In this period, thinkers do not establish any particular mode of philosophical speculation, but agree on many fundamental issues. Thinkers of Enlightenment age had faith on the idea on progress and emphasize on the application of scientific methods. Rousseau, as a

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product of Enlightenment has taken into account these developments. However, he protests against intelligence, science and reason in so far as they destroy reverence, faith and moral institution, the factors on which society is based. According to Rousseau, arts, manners and politeness not only destroy martial virtues, but also deny human nature forcing individuals to conceal 'their real selves'.

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### 5.5 Rousseau's Idea of Social Contract :

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We have already learnt that like Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau also belongs to the Social Contract school. According to Hobbes, social contract is essential in the state of nature for establishing peace and security for the preservation of life and liberty of every individual. But to Rousseau, peace has no meaning without freedom. Rousseau is of the view that 'Tranquility is also found in dungeons but is that enough to make them desirable places to live in?' Thus, Rousseau believes that the graveyard peace is no peace. Peace is real only when it is founded on liberty. **Therefore, Rousseau will not exchange liberty merely for the sake of peace.** To him, to renounce liberty is to renounce the essence of being human. Like Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau assumes that people enter into a social contract to come out of the wretched and unbearable conditions of the post-property stage of nature. According to him, once the serpent in the form of private property enters in the society, the whole order and peaceful atmosphere is disturbed and all feel the necessity of bringing back the old order of calmness and happy life. The Social Contract of Rousseau is not one-sided but mutual. Here, men will not surrender themselves to a sovereign or any external agency. According to Rousseau, each man of the state of nature will enter into a contract with every other person. Thus, in the state of nature, each man gives up their liberty to gain more than he has sacrificed. Hence, we can see that according to Rousseau's, the social contract helps to establish a strong common force that leads to the preservation of rights and freedoms of all the individuals in the society and secure peace for all the citizens. Rousseau discusses his theory of social contract in his famous work *The Social Contract*. According to him, society is inevitable as human life is impossible without it. Forced by such necessity, the individuals make a contract and establish civil society. In *The Emile*, he distinguishes between the state of nature and civil society and states his preference for the latter. In his words: Oh! Emile, where is the man who owes nothing to the land in which he lives? Whatever, that land may be, he owes to it the most precious thing possessed by man, the morality of his actions and the love of virtue. Born in the depth of forests he would have lived in greater happiness and freedom; but being able to follow his

inclinations without a struggle there would have been no merit in his goodness, he would not have been virtuous, as many be of his passions. The mere sight of order teaches him to know and love it. The public good, which to others is a mere pretext, is a real motive for him. He learns to fight against himself and to prevail, to sacrifice his own interest to the common weal. It is not true that he gains nothing from the laws; they give him courage to be just, even in the midst of the wicked. It is not true that they have failed to make him free; they have taught him to rule himself (Rousseau, 1911) From the above statement of Rousseau, it is evident that he prefers the State of Nature than the civil society established through social contract. However, with the increase in men's desire, the possibilities of inequalities also increase. And therefore, the people of the state of nature make a contract. The main features of Rousseau's Social Contract are:

**Stop to Consider :**

**Influence of Rousseau's idea on French Revolution :**

The Social Contract (1762) written by Rousseau has considerably influenced the French Revolution. This book starts with the famous declaration, "man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains". The phrases like liberty, equality and fraternity used in The Social Contract inspired the French Revolution. Therefore, Vaughan has opined that Rousseau's ideas are put into practice during the 'later and more terrible phases of the Revolution' (Vaughan, 1962). Rousseau believes in the natural goodness of man. According to him, human beings are corrupted by the greed and competition of civilization. Rousseau's ideas are based on reason which influenced the French Revolution. According to Rousseau, politics is not based on some fictional social contract, but instead upon the general will of the people in a community. Thus Rousseau emphasized the liberty of the individual which became the hallmark of the French Revolution. This is why Rousseau is regarded as the spiritual father of the French Revolution.

- The individual is made to surrender everything to the society but receives back what he surrenders as a member of the society. In this sense he is not a loser but gainer.
- The individual surrenders all his rights not to any individual but to a body of which he himself is a part.
- The contract gives rise to an organic society. It is a moral being possessing its own life, will and entity. Rousseau calls it public person.
- The contract leads to material and moral transformation of the individual.

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Now we are in a position to find an explicit difference between the contracts provided by Locke and Rousseau. While Locke's contract takes into consideration a specific object in view, Rousseau's contract is a continuous process because he believes that the community can grow rich and become fertile only with the constant participation of the individual in the welfare of the society.

Rousseau also argues that state results from a contract between individuals in their personal capacity and individuals in their corporate capacity. Through the social contract, Rousseau merges the individual completely into the state and creates a political society which is based on the consent of all the members. He maintains that this system of equality makes all to surrender their rights. Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains: In the opening page of his famous work, *The Social Contract*, Rousseau observes that, **'Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains'**. As we see, this observation has serious contradictions — how can man be free and yet remain in chains? But such contradiction is only at the surface level as by making this observation, Rousseau actually wants to reaffirm the fact that man is free by birth and by nature and therefore, he is entitled to have a free life in the society. However, in civil society every man becomes a slave of customs, conventions and also of laws as these are invented by a few clever men to perpetuate their power and domination over the vast majority of common men. Rousseau also strongly believes that even the men who claim to be the masters fail to realize that they are slaves of their own creation as they are in constant danger of being deprived of their possessions. Therefore, Rousseau makes this statement before discussing his idea on social contract. We must remember here that Rousseau is considered to be a great supporter of individual liberty as liberty is the central concept of his thought. His main concern is to deal with the mechanisms through which human beings are forced to give up their liberty. His idea of social contract delineates that the governed agrees to be ruled by the government for protecting their rights and property and ensure happiness. Once rulers cease to protect the governed, the latter are free to choose another set of governors. Thus, we can see that Rousseau makes the governed powerful by giving them the power to change the rulers and thereby paves the way for democratic rule.

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### Check Your Progress

1. Rousseau considers man as wicked by nature (write True or False)
2. Mention two characteristics of human beings as pointed out by Rousseau.

3. Write two lines on Rousseau's idea of the state of nature.
4. According to Rousseau, why did man give up the state of nature and make a contract?
5. Explain, 'Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains'.

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#### 5.6 Summing up :

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After reading this unit, you must have gathered a comprehensive knowledge of Rousseau's ideas. Rousseau has made lasting contribution to the field of Political Science through his ideas on human nature and social contract. Rousseau differs from Hobbes in regard to the nature of human beings. According to him, human beings are good only when they are self-sufficient and not subject to the vices of political society. In short, every man in the state of nature lives a life of idyllic simplicity and happiness. Rousseau considers the human beings in the state of nature as the 'noble savages'. This unit also helps us to comprehend Rousseau's idea on state of nature and social contract. He began his discussion on 'The Social Contract' with the famous sentence that 'Man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains'. Thus, he believed that people could experience true freedom when they lived in a civil society which ensures rights and well beings of the citizens. In the last unit of this block we shall deal with Rousseau's idea of General Will which has received wide attention from the political philosophers.

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#### 5.7 References and Suggested Readings

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**Unit 6 :****J.J Rousseau :General Will and Democracy**

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**Unit Structure :**

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Objectives
- 6.3 Rousseau's idea on General Will
- 6.4 Characteristics of General Will
- 6.5 Criticism of General Will
- 6.6 Rousseau on Democracy
- 6.7 Summing Up
- 6.8 References and Suggested Readings

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**6.1 Introduction**

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In the previous unit we have discussed some of the ideas of Jean J Rousseau. We already know that Rousseau is one of the important political thinkers of 18th Century. He is as an advocate of liberalism as he has emphasized on individual liberty. He tried to trace the relationship between human society and the individuals. His theories of Sovereignty and Law have immensely contributed towards French Revolution. Moreover, his ideas on 'General Will' is also very significant in the political discourse. For Rousseau, The general will is so important because it alone can direct the state toward the goal which is common welfare. However, Rousseau believed that General Will of the people can not be decided by elected people representatives. He advocated for a direct democracy in which everyone voted to express the general will and thus make the laws of the land.

In this unit we shall deal with Rousseau's idea of General Will and his views on democracy and representative government.

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**6.2 Objectives**

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Rousseau's idea of General Will is his significant contribution to Political Philosophy. Through this concept, Rousseau's wanted to establish democracy.

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- To analyse Rousseau’s view on General Will
- To Examine Rousseau’s view on Democracy

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### **6. 3 Rousseau’s View on General Will :**

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Rousseau introduces his concept of ‘General Will’ *first in The Discourse on Political Economy* and further develops it in *The Social Contract*. According to Rousseau, before joining the society, man use to live in the state of nature in which all are equal and live peacefully. Life, in the state of nature is simple and not organized. It needs to be mentioned here that historically such a society does not exist but Rousseau creates such a society in which people possess the capacity to learn as well as understand. In such a society, private property does not exist and all co-operate with each other in gathering food. Emergence of private property has disturbed this social setting and created a state of anarchy and disorder. According to Rousseau, the community established through the social contract is a corporate body with a personality and a will of its own. This common will of the community has been termed as the ‘General Will’. In Rousseau’s opinion, the social contract makes the community sovereign and therefore, the General Will is also sovereign. By obeying the General Will a man becomes a citizen and not a subject. He also opines that the obedience to the General Will is compulsory for all in the society. If anybody refuses to obey the General Will, he will be forced to obey it.

Thus, in Rousseau’s words, “The General Will means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free”. We can now comprehend that Rousseau’s General Will cannot be arbitrary or oppressive because the sovereign to whom it belongs cannot be arbitrary. He states that, “the Sovereign, merely by virtue of what it is, always what it ought to be”. As a result, neither the sovereign nor the General Will can go wrong. Rousseau again says that the General Will always aims the preservation and welfare of the whole and of every part, and is the source of laws. Now let us discuss Rousseau’s idea on General and particular will-----  
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We have already discussed that the General Will aims at the general good and it must come from all and apply to all. Each individual in a community has his/her own will. It may be called the ‘particular will’ of the individual. Each particular will has two different aspects – selfish and general. The selfish will is also called the actual will of every individual



that induces man to think only of his own interest while the general aspect of the particular will asks him to find his own interest in the general interest of the community. Thus the selfish or actual will aims at the good of the individual alone. The selfish wills of individuals in the community clash with each other and cancel each other. As a result, the general aspects of all the individual wills remain. All the general aspects of the individual wills together become the General Will of the community.

According to Rousseau, this General Will of the community is unselfish and aims at the good of all and therefore, it is termed as 'real will'. The real will based on reason and foresightedness of the individuals is higher, nobler and supreme which impels the person to think of the well-being of all rather than his self-interest. Thus it is the moral will.

Again Rousseau believes that the General Will must be consciously adopted and continuously operated. To practice the concept of General Will, the citizens must find opportunities to come together, discuss their affairs in common and arrive at unanimous decisions. This is possible only in small societies. While formulating the idea of General Will, Rousseau has in mind the city Republics of Geneva. **Thus, the concept of General Will is based on the idea of direct democracy.**

**The General Will of Rousseau resides in a community and it cannot be alienated from the community.** This will of the community cannot be delegated to any person. Likewise, the General Will cannot be represented also as the representative may develop a will of its own in the process which is different from the General Will. Therefore, the General Will has no place in the representative democracy.

Rousseau distinguishes his General Will from the will of the all. He says that whereas the will of the all is merely a majority will which is concerned with the welfare of a few only, the General Will thinks in terms of the good of the community as a whole. The difference between these two wills can be explained in the following words of Rousseau, "There is often a considerable difference between General Will and the will of all, the former aims at the common interests, the latter aims at private interest and is only a sum of particular wills. But if we take away from the various particular interests which conflict with each other, what remains as the sum of difference is General Will". According to Rousseau, the existence of organized groups and associations within a society is again a hindrance to the expression of General Will. It is because General Will is the will of the whole community and therefore, it should not have any rival. Thus,

the General Will of Rousseau demands unconditional loyalty of all in the community. When the loyalties are divided, General Will ceases to exist. Commitment to the General Will is a commitment to what is just and what is moral. General Will can never be arbitrary since it belongs to the community as a whole. Rousseau believes that the, ‘community merely by virtue of what it is always what it ought to be’.

Thus, the General Will is the source of all laws. He further believes that there is a close relationship between law and liberty. Therefore, he opines that, “obedience to law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty”.

**Stop To Consider:**

**Rousseau’s Idea on Family and Woman :**

Rousseau considers family as the natural and the oldest institution of the human society. Rousseau favours a patriarchal family providing the authoritative powers to the man and believes that the identity of women is related to the identity of man. Rousseau’s idea on family is thus based upon his views on woman. He assigns a subordinate position to women in society and believes that women should be educated in such a way that gives them an inferior position in comparison to their male counterparts. Rousseau’s view on the nature of the relationship between men and women is rooted in the notion that men are stronger and, therefore, more independent. He also argues that since the functions of men and women differ, their education will also have to be different. Thus, according to Rousseau, while men enjoy the maximum freedom, women should be trained to accept the constraints. In Rousseau’s words, Woman is specially made for man’s delight. If man in his turn ought to be pleasing in her eyes, the necessity is less urgent, his virtue is in his strength, he pleases because he is strong. I grant you this is not the law of love, but it is the law of nature, which is older than love itself.....If woman is made to please and to be in subjection to man, she ought to make herself pleasing in his eyes and not provoke him to anger (Rousseau 1911:322).

Here you must remember that Rousseau is considered a totalitarian because he regards sovereignty as absolute and thus individuals have no rights or guarantees against it. He further believes that those who refuse to obey the General Will should be forced to do so and thus they “will be forced to flee.”

( Philip J. Kain, 1990).

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However, many scholars disagree to the above views.

In the simple way, we can say that The General Will is simply defined as that which tends to right or which aims at the common good. When it does not it simply is not called the General Will.

Some conditions mentioned by Rousseau in Social Contract -----

- i). All citizens must sit on the sovereign body—the legislature and must vote on all issues. There can be no representation – each must vote in person.
- ii). General will should be general in its object as well as in its essence -- it should come from all to apply to all.
- iii). All laws must be rigorously and equally enforced; Rousseau (in Emile) says ‘everyone necessarily subjects himself to the conditions he imposes on others. If each citizen knows that they and all others will be strictly bound by the law they are voting on, they will take great care to see that it is right and equal for all. (ibid)

Hence, we can say Rousseau is giving us some idea through which outlining a procedure which if the sovereign can discover what actually is right.

Christopher Bertram has talked about two conceptions of General Will. First one is democratic where Rousseau clearly envisages that the citizens of a legitimate state assemble together in person to legislate and he identifies their legislation with General Will.

He has further stated that there are considerable differences between will of all and General Will declaring that ‘the latter looks only to the common interest, the former looks to the private interest and is nothing but the sum of particular wills.

The contrast between democratic and transcendent conceptions of the General Will raises questions not only about Rousseau’s own thought but also about politics and philosophy in general. We must know that the correct understanding of the General Will turns out to be thoroughly democratic one. By ‘forced to be free’ Rousseau understands freedom as non-subjection to the will of a particular other.

Rousseau on democracy: Rousseau defines democracy as a government in which the sovereign straightway may deliver the power to all the people or to the larger parts of the people in such a way that the citizen

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magistrates may outnumber the simple private citizens. Or, the sovereign may entrust it to the hands of a small number in such a way that there are more private citizens than magistrates an aristocracy.

Or finally, the sovereign may entrust it to the care of one magistrate, from whom other magistrates will receive their powers. Rousseau declares that this kind of government is the most common and is called monarchy.

Again, Rousseau's view on aristocracy is related to the modern concept of democracy. According to him, there are three kinds of aristocracy--

- a). the natural
- b). the elective
- c). the hereditary

According to Rousseau, the second is the best and the wisest be entrusted with the government of others, particularly when it is certain that they will rule for the interest of the others. Here, we can conclude that what Rousseau called aristocracy is what we would normally call democracy. Rousseau stresses nonetheless that the contrast can be revoked at any moment that representative government is fundamentally vicious and illegitimate.

Rousseau draws a distinction between government and sovereignty. Moreover, while giving his ideas on Government vis-à-vis Democracy, Rousseau has always kept in mind his theory of General will. General will paves the way to understand what is just and unjust. On the basis of this, he further states that the government is formed for the purpose of guaranteeing the property, the life, and the freedom of each individual.

Now let us have a look at the rules Rousseau has set for the legitimate popular government to follow-----

- i). The General Will Must always be followed
- ii). All particular wills must be in right relation to it.
- iii). The general interest even in conflict with the personal interest must be respected.
- iv). Government rightly constituted must look after the preservation of each citizen.
- v). It must also forestall any extreme inequality in wealth.
- vi). Foster loyal citizens take care of all and see to the education of each.

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#### 6.4 Characteristics of General Will:

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The General Will of Rousseau is the corporate will, sovereign will and just will. It is the foundation of moral freedom which makes every individual a free citizen of the state. It is the source of all laws which promote the good of the community as a whole. The General Will is the best safeguard against despotism of any kind. The theory of General Will advocated by Rousseau has been described as the most revolutionary, distinguishing, impressive and influential doctrine of Rousseau. According to Prof. Jones, “the notion of the General Will is not only the most central concept of Rousseau’s theory, it is also the most original, the most interesting and historically the most important contribution which he has made to Political theory”.

Now, from the above discussion, we can summarise the main characteristics of the General Will as follows:

- It is individualistic. It cannot be divided. Once it is divided, it shall cease to be the General Will
- Like the human will, the General Will cannot be represented by anybody else.
- The General Will is supreme and absolute and nobody can disobey it. It has complete control over the state.
- The General will is a single unit and cannot be alienated. Rousseau’s sovereign is the General Will and not any human being. Rousseau’s sovereign in fact cannot give up the sovereignty and also cannot pass that onto any other individual. The sovereignty or sovereign and General Will are inseparable and hence inalienable.
- The General Will always aims at the well-being of the community. It is based on the right of reasoning, presumption, wisdom and experience and cannot be swayed by the currents of time.
- Since General Will was based on reason, wisdom, and experience it is permanent.
- Self-interest in a certain sense is at the very heart of the General Will. As Rousseau says, “why is the General Will always right and why do all constantly want the happiness of each, if not because there is no one who does not apply this word each to himself, and not think of himself as he votes for all? Which proves that the equality of right, and the concept of justice it produces, are derived from each man’s preference for himself and consequently from the nature of man.” Self-interest must be present –each must think of themselves –but they must consider their self-interest in the abstract case where laws

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will be rigorously and equally enforced for all. Again, self-interest must not be eliminated, it must be transformed. (Philip J. Kain, 1990)

Thus, from the discussion of his idea of General Will, we can say that Rousseau's idea of General Will paves the way for the present form of democratic system. So, we can say that Rousseau has supported the idea of direct democratic system where everyone can participate in the decision making process of the government.

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### **6.5 : Criticism of General Will:**

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Rousseau's idea of General Will is criticized because of his contradictory opinions. On one hand, Rousseau argues that General Will allows for individual diversity and freedom, but at the same time, the General Will also encourages the well-being of the whole, and therefore, can conflict with the particular interests of individuals. The General Will of the community has certain distinctive characteristics. According to Rousseau, General Will has no relation to numbers and as such it is not an arithmetical proposition. Thus, the General Will does not represent the will of the majority or the will of the whole community. However, it cannot be regarded as the will of the minority also. Neither, this is the will of a single individual.

Again, he has also spoke about undemocratic conception of sovereignty, particularly book 2 Chapter 3, "Whether General Will can Err" In that Chapter Rousseau contrasts the General Will which is "always upright and always tends to the public utility" with the "people's deliberations" which do not.

There is no independent and reliable way of actually telling what the General Will is or whether it has been realized.

However, Rousseau has given a clear mechanism --- a set of institutions and procedures --- which if carried out will actually produce the general will which will be right and tend to the common good.

We must remember that sovereign is absolute. There can be no higher authority or power which limits the sovereign.

Moreover, General Will can never harm the individual; that it is always right and never unjust. It always tends to equality.

General Will is not what Rousseau calls the 'Will of all'. The General will expresses the common interest, but the will of all expresses the sum of private interests.

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The will of all is the sum total of the different particular interests of the citizens; it is what is registered in any ordinary majority vote. The General Will is not the vote of the majority – the will of all or the sum of particular interests --- is not necessarily so.

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**SAQ**

Do you think that Rousseau's is applicable in a country like India?  
Give reasons in support of your answer (50 words)

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**6.6 Rousseau on Democracy:**

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We have already learnt that Rousseau supports the system of direct democratic system. In the present context, we understand democracy in the light of the representative governmental system. But Rousseau does not favour a representative parliamentary government. Instead, he advocates for a participatory democracy as it guarantees freedom, self-rule, equality and virtue.

Again Rousseau believes that the General Will must be consciously adopted and continuously operated. To practice the concept of General Will, the citizens must find opportunities to come together, discuss their affairs in common and arrive at unanimous decisions. This is possible only in small societies. While formulating the idea of General Will, Rousseau has in mind the city Republics of Geneva. **Thus, the concept of General Will is based on the idea of direct democracy.**

**Again, as we have discussed earlier,** the General Will of Rousseau cannot be represented. Rousseau does not believe in the representative bodies because such bodies may also develop a will of its own, different from the General Will. Therefore, there cannot be General Will in the representative democracy.

He further opines that the people of England are free and their General Will gets manifested or translated into actuality only when they go to polls. Such freedom cannot be enjoyed by them in other occasions. Again, the General Will is opposed to party government. It is because, in a party government, various parties develop their own general wills. In such a scenario, the general representing the satisfaction and the good

of the community as a whole is very difficult to achieve.

Rousseau advocates the establishment of a democratic sovereign through his idea of 'General Will'. However, he does not advocate any form of direct democratic government in the Social Contract. Rousseau, on the other hand warns humanity against the democratic government. In his *The Social Contract* Rousseau further states that, In the strict sense of the term, **a genuine Democracy never has existed, and never will exist.** It is against the natural order that the greater number govern and the smaller numbers be governed. It is unimaginable that the people remain constantly assembled to attend to public affairs, and it is readily evident that it could not establish commissions to do so without the form of administration changing.

Another important factor for opposing representative and democratic government is that Rousseau wants to make a clear distinction between legislation and execution. He opposes democratic government as in this system, the same person acts as the sovereign as well as the government. So in the words of Rousseau, "it is not good that he who makes the laws execute them, nor that the body of the people turn its attention away from general considerations, to devote it to particular objects. Nothing is more dangerous than the influence of private interests on public affairs, and abuse of the laws by Government is a lesser evil than the corruption of the Lawgiver (the Sovereign); which is the inevitable consequence of particular considerations". Rousseau further believes that freedom, self-rule, equality are the major pillars of democracy and the governments which fails to fulfil those criteria can never claim an individual's obedience.

Rousseau rejects the English Parliamentary System of government as he believes that it only gives the people the illusion of freedom but not the absolute freedom. According to him, English people are free only during the time of elections and once they elect their representatives, they tend to loose freedom. Thus, he states that, "Sovereignty cannot be represented, for the same reason that it cannot be alienated.....the people's deputies are not and could not be, its representatives; they are merely its agents and they cannot decide anything faintly" (Rousseau 1958:141). To enjoy absolute freedom, Rousseau proposes direct participation in legislation. Though he rejects representative institutions, he feels the need that the democratic institutions should protect the true freedom of the individual. Again, Rousseau assigns significant role to the legislators. According to him, the role of the legislator is to transform

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individuals and change human nature, alter the constitution with the purpose of strengthening it and bring about a complete moral existence to an otherwise partial one. (Mukherjee, 2007)

### Check Your Progress

1. Write two characteristics of the General Will.
2. Fill in the blanks
  - a) The General Will aims at the general \_\_\_\_\_ and it must come from \_\_\_\_\_ and apply to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b) The General Will of Rousseau resides in a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Discuss how General Will is different from the will of all.
4. Why does Rousseau advocate participatory democracy? Write briefly on Rousseau's idea of representative government.
5. Discuss critically Rousseau's idea on Democracy.
6. Analyse Rousseau's view on Representative government.

Rousseau is considered a Champion of democracy. For him, in a democratic government sovereign may straightway deliver the power to all the people or to the larger part of the people in such a way that the citizen magistrates may outnumber the simple private citizens. Or, the sovereign may entrust it to the hands of a small number, in such a way that there are more private citizens than magistrates, an aristocracy. Or, finally, the sovereign may entrust it to the care of one magistrate, from whom the other magistrates will receive their powers. Rousseau declares that this kind of government is the most common and is called monarchy. (Wade, 1976)

Thus, Rousseau's concept of democracy supports the most fundamental and basic premise of democracy --- one in which all citizens directly participate. In Rousseau's democracy people are both the subject and the sovereign and as such they are the law-makers as well as are subject to law.

Although the people are both sovereign and subjects, the sovereignty of the people is based solely in the assembly. Again, Rousseau states that all laws passed by the assembly are solely the authentic acts of the general will and because general will is always right, all laws passed are inherently good.

Rousseau believed that good government must have the freedom of all

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its citizens as its most fundamental objective. He has outlined some principles in his Social Contract and other works of political philosophy. Rousseau firmly believes that a good government is formed by the people and guided by the General Will of society. Thus, Rousseau advocated direct democracy--- one where the people made the laws and everyone had some influence.

In his political philosophy, The Social Contract, Rousseau asserts that democracy is incompatible with representative institution. According to him, Sovereignty of the people can neither be alienated nor represented. The idea of representation is a modern idea. According to him, “in the ancient Republics, the people never had representatives. The moment a people allows itself to be represented, it is no longer free; it no longer exists.”

Many think that Rousseau gives a pessimistic view of democracy. To quote Rousseau, “it is unimaginable that the people should remain continually assembled to devote their time to public affairs.” He concludes that “were there a people of gods, their government would be democratic. So perfect a government is not for men.”

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### **6.7 Summing Up:**

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After reading this unit, you must have learnt that the General Will of Rousseau resides in a community and it can not be alienated from the community. In his opinion, General Will is the will of the whole community and therefore it should not have any rival. Again, we have found that Rousseau distinguished General Will from the will of all. Again, Rousseau says that, “when a particular object has different relationships to different individuals, each one having its own will concerning this object, there is no general will that is perfectly unified concerning this individual object.” Moreover, after reading the unit we come to the conclusion that Rousseau does not favour a representative parliamentary government. Instead, he advocates for a participatory democracy as it secures freedom, self-rule, equality and virtue. Through his idea of ‘General Will’ Rousseau has advocated the establishment of a democratic sovereign. Idea of General Will automatically paves the way for a democratic political society. Therefore, many call him a radical democrat. Apart from the ideas which enrich the domain of political theory, the attempt to reconcile individual interests with the larger interests of the society is Rousseau’s major contribution to the field of Political Science

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