

ENLIGHTENED REPUBLIC



**Philosophical Foundations of the U.S.
Democratic System**

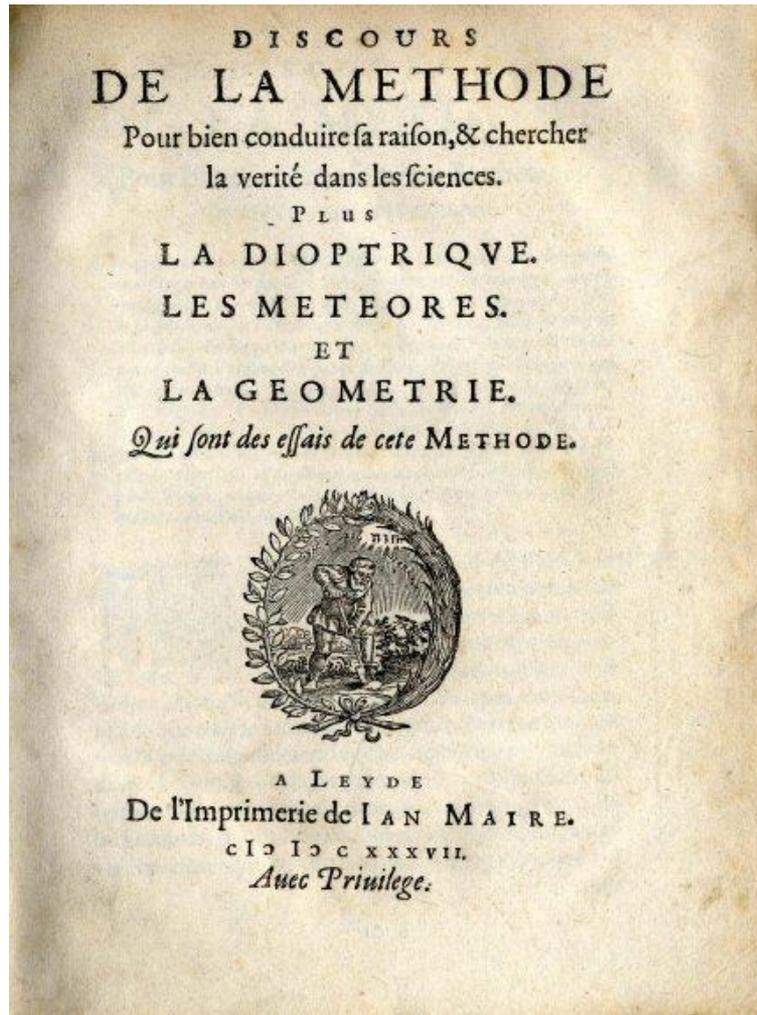
Basics of Political Philosophy

quoted from Alan Gewirth, *Political Philosophy* (Macmillan, 1965), p.4

... the chief concern of political philosophy is with the most general moral questions of society and government...

1. ***General question about society: Why should men live in society at all?***
2. ***General question about government: Why should men obey any government at all? Why should some men have political power over others?***
3. ***Specific questions about government [or political power]:***
 - a. ***Source and locus of political power. By what criteria is it to be determined who should have political power?***
 - b. ***Limits of political power. By what criteria is it to be determined what should be the extent of political power and what rights or freedoms should be exempt from political or legal control?***
 - c. ***Ends of political power. To the attainment of what affirmative ends should political power be directed, and what are the criteria for determining this?***

ENLIGHTENMENT ANSWERS

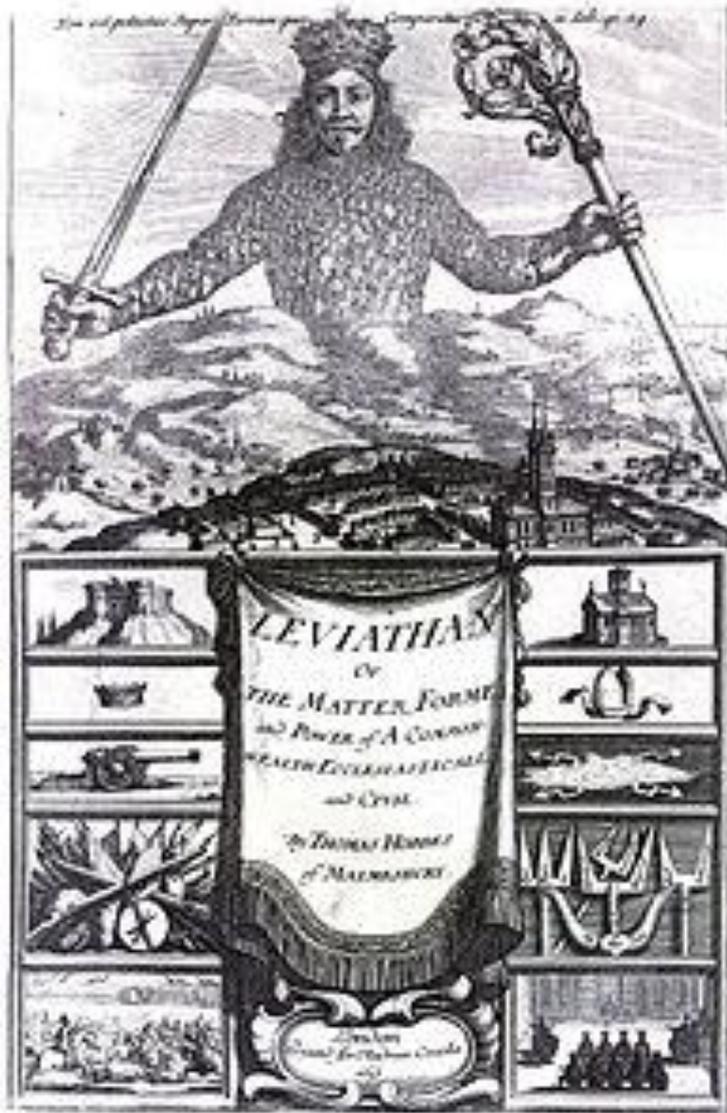


- The European “Age of Reason” (1650-1805) questioned everything in the light of philosophic reason.
- A central concern was determining what constituted legitimate political authority.
- Various thinkers took up the basic political questions.

ENLIGHTENMENT PREMISES

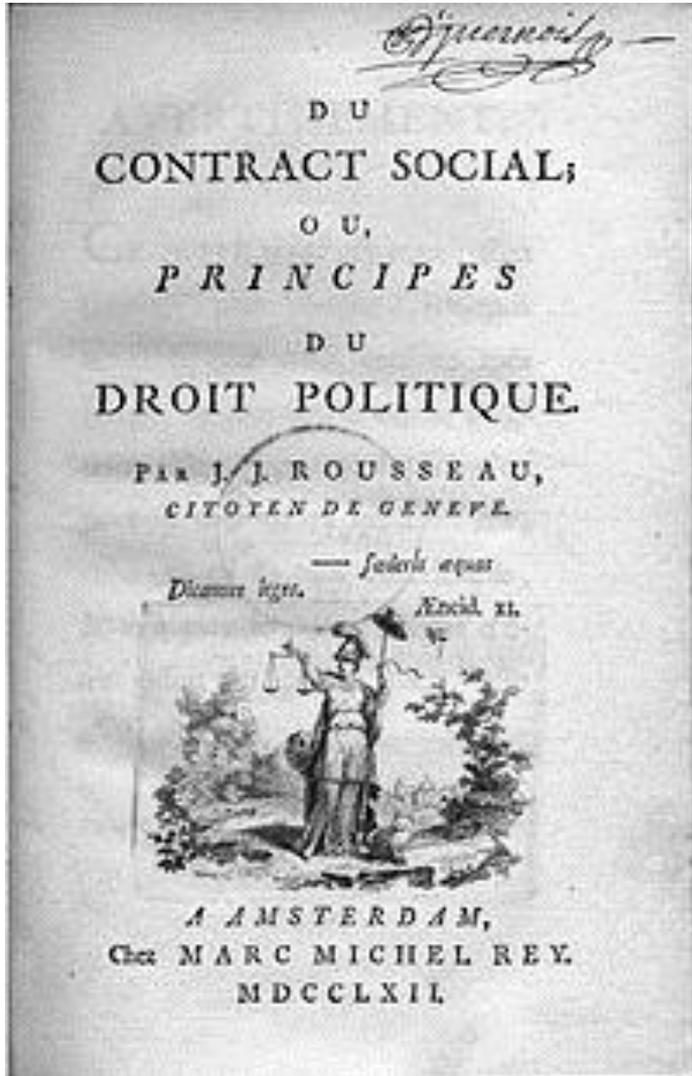
- Why live in society? *To achieve social benefits, overcoming “state of nature.”*
- Why obey any government? *To pursue and ensure justice and social tranquillity.*
- What are the sources, limits, and goals of political power? *Consent of the governed, due respect for individual persons, prosperity and welfare of all citizens.*

HOBBS' APPROACH



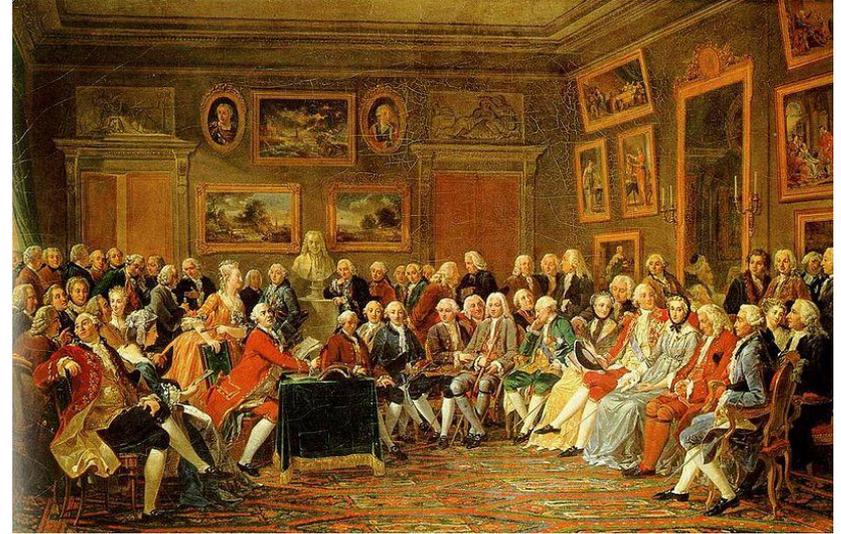
- Life in state of nature is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”
- To overcome “war of each against all” and obtain security, all agree to submit to strong sovereign authority of one man or a small group.
- Ruler’s power lasts only as long as he can protect his subjects effectively.

ROUSSEAU'S APPROACH



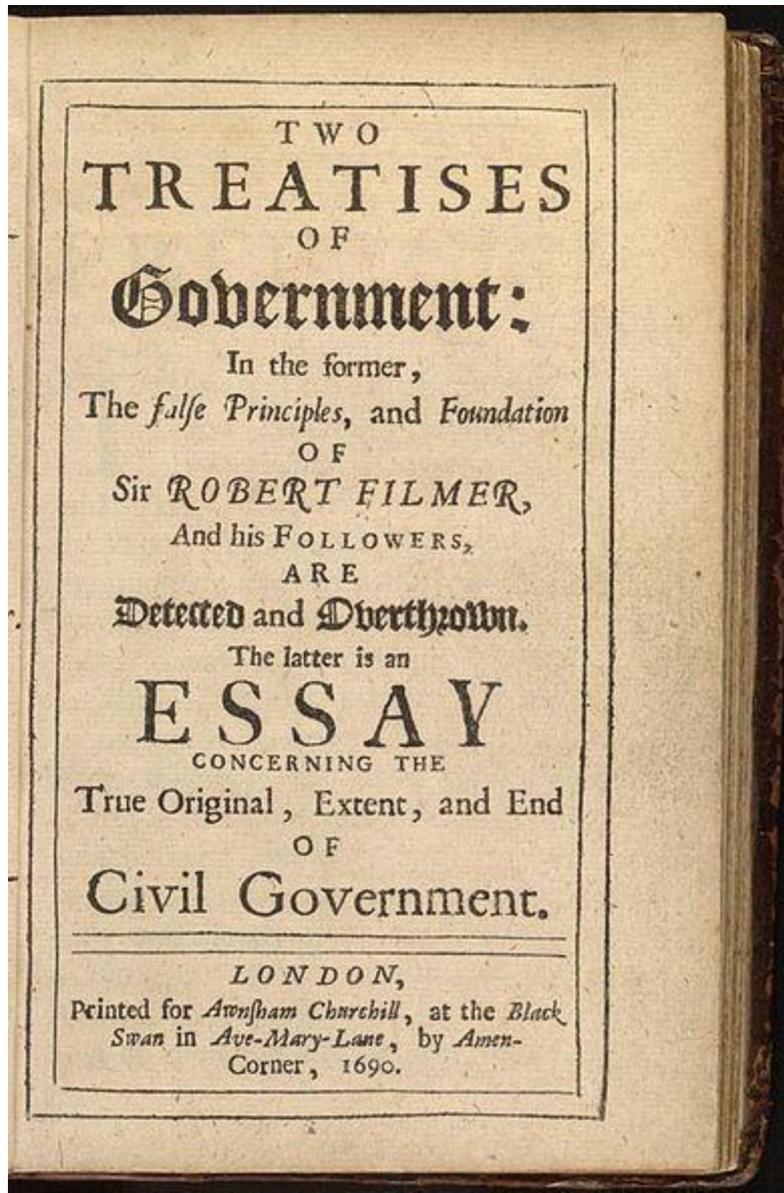
- “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.”
- By social contract man loses natural liberty for civil liberty to benefit from common action.
- State reflects the general will, infallible in general legislation.
- Balance of principles: the graver the issue, the more nearly unanimous must be the prevailing opinion; the more urgent the issue, the smaller the proportional majority.

HOBBS versus ROUSSEAU



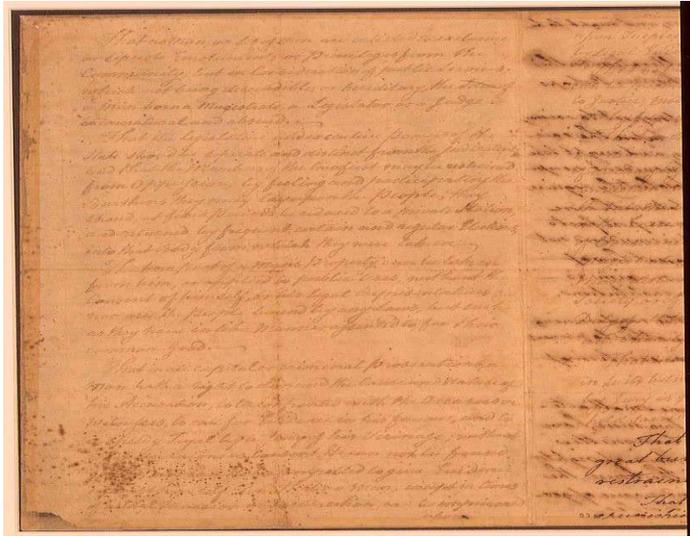
- Hobbes had a pessimistic perspective: human beings are brutal and violent by nature.
- Rousseau had an optimistic viewpoint: human beings are beatific and cooperative by nature.
- Somewhere between these two is a realistic view: people are imperfect but capable of improvement.

LOCKE'S MODERATE MIDDLE



- “...all men are naturally in...a state of perfect freedom...” and “all men by nature are equal.”
- “Political power [is]...a right of making laws...for the regulating and preserving of property...”
- “one supreme power...the legislative...yet...there remains...in the people a supreme power to remove ...the legislative, when they find the legislative act contrary to the trust reposed in them.”

AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT



- The Founding Fathers had a common political philosophy, as reflected by Locke: "no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions."
- Virginia Declaration of Rights: "...all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights... the enjoyment of life and liberty, ... acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety."
- Declaration of Independence: "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, ... with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."
- Political debate centered on balancing individual freedom with social order.

FEDERAL REPUBLICAN DEMOCRACY'S PURPOSES



- Form a more perfect (federal) union
- Establish justice
- Ensure domestic tranquillity
- Provide for the common defense
- Promote the general welfare
- Secure benefits of liberty now and in the future