Outline Lecture Two—Enlightenment Social Contract Theory

Key Questions behind social contract theories:

1) What constitutes a legitimate, just, and viable civil society?
   What agreements need to be observed in the new social and political “jungle”?

2) What can serve as a viable proxy to the state of nature and alternative to absolute power?
   In a new age without traditional constraints, how can individuals reconcile their
   natural liberties, such as the pursuit of self-gain, with the need for self-preservation?

I) From the State of Nature to Civil Society
   a) Hobbes Argument for a Powerful Sovereign or Leviathan
      i) Hobbes’s conception of the state of nature
         (1) Based on his assessment of Cromwellian England
         (2) “No propriety, no dominion no mine and thine distinct”
      ii) Three inescapable motives for conflict in the state of nature
         (1) Competition, diffidence, need for glory
      iii) State of nature is by definition a constant state of war
         (1) Only assured a life “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (8)
      iv) The Necessary Concession
         (1) “A common power to keep all in awe”—a “leviathan”

   b) Locke’s Argument for a Representative Government of the Propertied Class
      i) More Benign View of the State of Nature
         (1) Governed by an innate gift of reason endowed by God
         (2) Rational deterrence through an “eye for an eye” form of justice
      ii) “Inconveniences of the State of Nature”
         (1) Human nature unchecked is prone to self-interest, partiality, and passions
         (a) “Every man is towards himself, and them who greatly affects, partial; and
             therefore, strife and troubles would be endless” (21)
         (b) Rejection of Hobbes’s assumptions
      iii) “Common-wealth” as the only dependable sovereign
         (1) Only a corporate authority entrusted with the “common welfare” of society
         (2) Justification for the Glorious Revolution of 1689 and the parliamentary
             government it established

   c) Rousseau’s Argument for a Direct Democracy under the General Will
      i) “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” (85)
         (1) The natural state for all men, without exception, is liberty
         (2) Yet that state of nature is irretrievable
      ii) Critique of Traditional Justifications for Legitimacy
         (1) Power based on Paterfamilias
         (a) Logic of paterfamilias cannot be applied to the state
         (b) Myth of ruler as the “father” or “shepherd” of the people
         (2) Arbitrary Power based on Force
         (a) Submission to force is always out of necessity, not unconditional or natural
         (i) People only yield to force if they regard it as a potent threat
(3) Power based on Enslavement
   (a) Radical view that departs from Locke
   (b) War is between states and their interests, not personal between men
      (i) Thus, conquest and slavery do not provide for legitimate sovereignty

iii) What type of civil society can serve as a legitimate proxy for the state of nature?
   (1) Total Sublimation to the General Will
      (a) Total surrender of natural liberties to the will of the collective community
      (b) “In giving himself to all, gives himself to no one”
   (2) What about private property?
      (a) Allow for limited private property based on three qualifications:
      (b) Yet all land under the collective trust of the General Will

iv) Happy compromise?
   (1) Firm collective “ownership” rather than fragile individual possession
   (2) What we lose in natural liberty, we gain in civil liberty

II) What legacy did all these various social contract theories have on modern political ideology?