

Hume's Doubts About Politics: A Critique and Reimagining of Social Contract Theory

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Abstract

This paper examines and assesses Hume's skepticism regarding the social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Consequently, Hume, in response to the assertions of contractarians who argued that political power is founded on a contract among rational individuals, contended that political authority originates from custom, use, and historical precedent. His critique consequently refutes the function of reason in establishing the legitimacy of political institutions, contending that they develop over time. Hume adopts a radical enlightenment perspective, asserting that every revolution always results in political instability. The paper seeks to elucidate the political theories of David Hume and articulate the relevance of this philosopher's ideas in analyzing contemporary politics and political systems, as well as in assessing which political frameworks should be considered legitimate today. This research analyses Hume's perspectives on custom, gradualism, and the emotional foundation of political authority, providing a comprehensive account of political legitimacy in historical and present contexts.

Keywords: political legitimacy, social contract theory, David Hume, gradualism, political stability

1. Introduction

1.1 *Introducing Hume's Critique of the Social Contract Theory*

For centuries, social contract theory has influenced Western political thinking, which continues to be a crucial aspect in establishing political authority based on historical experience. The thesis, formulated by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, posits that political organizations arise from individuals' voluntary agreements. In this 'state of nature,' we would all recognize the necessity of a government to maintain order, safeguard our rights, and avert violence. The social contract, whether stated or implied, refers to an agreement among rational individuals acknowledging that collaboration and government are essential for safeguarding their welfare.

The social contract hypothesis posits that an individual's consent to governance establishes the legitimacy of political authority. This idea posits that a government's legitimacy hinges on its capacity to fulfil the contract by safeguarding the rights and interests of its citizens. This concept is the cornerstone of contemporary democratic ideology, pertinent to the most advanced constitutional governance, the most comprehensive human rights framework, and the most sophisticated application of the rule of law. The social contract elucidates the rationale for political power by addressing the issue of political obligation, namely why individuals should submit to the State's authority and adhere to the law (Tamang, 2023).

However, the social contract hypothesis has faced significant criticism from numerous philosophers, though not based on the foundations of rationalist theory. David Hume is among the most critical, challenging its underlying assumptions and, consequently, the theory itself. Hume regarded the social contract as a 'historical fiction', meaning it was a mental fabrication, an intellectual construct that inaccurately depicted the origins of political communities. In his article 'Of the Original Contract,' Hume (1748) contends that political institutions are seldom, if ever, founded on rational agreements or free assent. Conversely, they emerge from historical processes, often involving invasion, usurpation, and the gradual accumulation of authority over time. According to Hume, political authority is established not by formal contracts but through the populace's custom, habit, and continuous acceptance.

Hume's critique of the social contract idea extends beyond its historical inaccuracies. He also contests the presumption that underpins the notion of human beings as predominantly rational agents who make political

decisions based on self-interest. Hume maintains that human action is predominantly influenced by passions, emotions, and social habits rather than rationality. In his *Treatise*, Hume (1739) famously asserted that 'Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions.' In stark contrast to the rationalist foundations of social contract theory, this perspective on human nature posits that man, akin to the Greek gods, is irrational and incapable of establishing political communities through reasoned consensus.

This paper examines Hume's critique of social contract theory and reevaluates the concepts of political legitimacy. Hume's skepticism undermines the conventional foundations of social contract theory while offering a novel perspective on establishing and maintaining political authority. This paper reconstructs political legitimacy based on Hume's philosophy by analyzing his perspectives concerning those of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. This study will primarily focus on the roles of custom, gradualism, and emotional attachment in the formation and persistence of political institutions (Brownsey, 1978). Hume's critique of the 'social contract' idea and his alternative framework emphasizing stability, order, and the organic evolution of political institutions continues to be a compelling and relevant perspective in the twenty-first century.

1.2 Political Thinkers: Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, and Hume's Skepticism

As developed by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, the social contract idea is characterized as a rationalist framework of authority. Assuming that individuals in the 'state of nature' see the necessity of forming a government to safeguard their rights, each of these philosophers advances his argument. As the subsequent section will demonstrate, while all these philosophers endorse the social contract theory, they exhibit notable differences in the condition of nature, the stipulations of the contract, and government objectives.

In *Leviathan*, published in 1651, Thomas Hobbes depicts the State of nature as one where life is 'nasty, brutish, and short' due to the condition of 'every man against every man.' He believes that humans, in their natural State, are inherently selfish and primarily focused on their survival. Human existence would be wretched without a supreme authority to serve as a mediator in society, sanctioning those who breach the laws of conduct. To escape this anarchy, individuals would rationally choose to enter into a social compact, surrendering their rights to an absolute monarch who, in exchange, guarantees order and protection (Balatsky & Ekimova, 2022). For Hobbes, this is the ultimate ruler to whom one possesses no rights other than obedience to preserve order and prevent a regression into the State of nature. Hobbes' conception of the social compact emphasizes the necessity of robust political authority to protect individuals from their inherent selfishness (TUȚUI, 2019).

In contrast to Hobbes's bleak depiction, John Locke presents a more optimistic perspective on the condition of nature in his two treatises on governance (Tuckness, 2005). Despite this, Locke acknowledges that in the state of nature, not everyone can legislate, yet everyone possesses the rational capacity to understand their basic rights to life, liberty, and property. In Locke's social contract theory, the essential aspect is not the sanctioning of inherent rights nor the imposition of obedience by an absolute ruler. Locke posits that individuals establish a government and confer permission to their political leaders primarily to protect their rights. In contrast to Hobbes, Locke regarded the social contract as a right of the populace to revolt against a government that fails to safeguard their rights to life, liberty, and property (Locke, 1989). Locke's political liberal concepts of constrained governance, fundamental individual liberties, and accountable leadership contributed to the emergence of modern liberal democracy (Boucher & Kelly, 2003).

The collectivist interpretation of the theory is presented in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's book, *The Social Contract*, published in 1762. Although Rousseau acknowledges the necessity of state governance through the rule of law to safeguard individual freedom, he contends that true liberty for the populace requires unification under a collective will. Rousseau explicitly asserts that the social contract encompasses not merely the establishment of a government but the deliberate orchestration of society to align individual wills with the general will, emancipating humanity. The collective's appeal for decision-making and the prioritization of the common good above individualism, as advocated by Hobbes and Locke, contradicted Rousseau's philosophy as articulated in 1762. According to his perspective on the social compact, the morals and ethics of political authority are paramount, as the citizens of a society must endeavor to be active participants in its governance (Seabright et al., 2021).

These philosophers do not evade David Hume's skepticism, as it targets their common assumptions. He rejects the notion that political societies are inherently contractual connections of persons in the State of nature, asserting instead that they are customary communities formed through habit and historical convenience. Hume asserts that the social contract theory is historically inaccurate and unsubstantiated. Hume posits that political institutions are not the intentional products of political wisdom but rather an organic development, gradually taking shape in response to societal needs and situational demands (Hume, 1748). Hume critiques social contract theory and his broader political skepticism through this rejection.

Hume presents a fundamentally distinct notion of legitimacy that contrasts with those of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Hume contested the social contract theorists' assertion that political power derives from the consent of a rational sovereign; rather, he argued that political legitimacy arises from established and stable administration structures. In this regard, Hume is arguably the most conservative of the philosophers relevant to this issue, as he contends that preserving existing systems and practices is preferable. This critique impacts the theory of political authority and introduces a novel perspective on political legitimacy grounded in empirical human behaviors and the historical development of social institutions (Laursen, 2011).

2. The Foundation of Hume's Political Skepticism: The Social Contract Theory

Hume's criticism of the social contract theory exemplifies his broader philosophical skepticism on the role of reason in decision-making. In the *Of the Original Contract*, Hume (1748) critiques the social contract as a 'philosophical mirage,' asserting that the contractarian basis of political alliances does not accurately reflect the historical development of political power. Inspired by Montesquieu, Hume concluded that governments and political institutions are not the products of rational agreements among persons seeking harmony, as posited by social contract theorists like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Social phenomena emerge progressively within society and are established via recurrent interactions. Political authority is not merely a remnant of an agreement among individuals to transfer power but rather the outcome of historical evolution (Yu & Deng, 2022).

Hume's rejection of social contract theory is a distinct departure from the rationality underpinning the theories of the State proposed by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. All these philosophers assume that individuals in the State of nature would recognize the necessity of establishing a government, so formulating a social contract that generates legitimate political authority. However, Hume contends that this rationalist perspective is inherently flawed. Brownsey (1978) contends that political authority is founded not on the tacit consent of the populace but on conventions recognized as societal norms. Hume observes that the notion of individuals intentionally consenting to governance is as implausible as the idea of them willingly binding themselves in political constraints; establishing a political society is seldom a clear process.

Indeed, Hume's skepticism regarding the social compact can be comprehended through his overarching worldview. In contrast to Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau, Hume contends that man is not a rational being, not a calculation of his self-interest. In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, published in 1739, Hume asserts, "Reason is, and ought only to be the Slave of the Passions" (Hume, 1739). These notions of human nature hold significant relevance to political theory. If humanity is predominantly governed by passion and inertia, then the idea that rational contracts establish political societies is absurd. Hume argues that political institutions are developed over time by building political character among individuals and establishing a stable political system (Laursen, 2011).

According to Hume, political obligation does not possess a rational foundation, specifically the rational foundation of consent. In this context, Hume contests the notion of political legitimacy as a construct stemming from a singular act of rational consensus. It is, nonetheless, the outcome of customs and traditions that individuals gradually embrace as a legitimate practice to be observed at every event. Consequently, individuals adhere to regulations as political institutions establish order within political life, leading to habituation. According to Singh and Kumar (2024), rather than consent, these habits constitute the foundation of political obligation in Hume's view.

This critique of social contract theory also expresses apprehension on the necessity of justifying the exercise of political power. In their writings, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau assert that political authority is legitimate only if it is founded on a concept of right or equality that individuals would comprehend and endorse when forming a political covenant. Hume also rejects this rationalist perspective on political authority (Economides, 2024). According to Hume, the legal authority of political institutions is not theoretical but is fundamentally rooted in the assurance of social peace. According to Hume, political institutions are deemed legitimate if they establish a foundation for a stable and secure polity and effectively prevent civil strife, regardless of whether they stem from principles of justice or equality (Laursen, 2011).

Hume's idea of political legitimacy is remarkably pragmatic. He is primarily concerned with the pragmatic implications of the term—specifically, whether a government can maintain societal stability and foster the conditions necessary for its attainment. In this regard, Hume's skepticism regarding the social contract yields a significantly less radical conception of political authority than Locke's. Rather than depicting political power as a construct of the populace, which they can perpetually reconstitute, Hume characterizes it as an established institution that should not be altered abruptly. Hume posits that a government should not be toppled or altered for a superior one unless the existing government has failed to provide order and stability. Political reform should be implemented gradually, adhering to tradition and aligning with society's best practices (Weber, 2009).

Hume offers an alternative explanation of political duty and its underlying basis in political power, rooted in a lack

of familiarity with social contract theory and the philosophical rationalism underpinning it. In contrast to Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, who offer an idealistic interpretation of political legitimacy, this concept can be regarded as a practical and historical perspective on political realism.

3. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau's Theories

3.1 The State of Nature and Social Contract in Political Philosophy

The social contract theory is based on the proposition that individuals in a "state of nature" were rational enough to realize that establishing a government was the only way to avoid the risks inherent in that situation. This theory supposes that being naked – without the shield of a state – people would be insecure enough to choose a collective response in the form of a government. While Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau agree on the idea of the social contract, they paint different pictures of what the State of nature was like and what kind of contract people would enter into.

According to Thomas Hobbes, if there were no state, it would be a state of war because people tend to kill one another. According to Hobbes, the sojourning scenario is characterized by what the author called the "war of all against all", signaled by self-centered relations devoid of a common authority to compel compliance to rules or enforce justice and order (Hobbes, 1651). Using the Master and servants' analogy, Hobbes asserts that if people wish to live flocculent lives, they would give up their natural rights and make a covenant with the Sovereign, who shall provide for peace and security. This social contract is not the best of ideas but the best of the worst because it is better than the State of nature.

However, John Locke offers a different account of the State of nature. In Locke's theory of the State of nature, people are, first of all, free and equal and have certain natural rights to life, liberty and property. These rights are unassailable; they are the core of Locke's social contract. People in the State of nature would understand the need to establish a government responsible for protecting these rights. In contrast with Hobbes, therefore, Locke sees the State of nature as a state of war only in the precise sense of not being a legal state: people are there rational, and therefore fully capable of living peaceably, without the mediation of the law. In Locke's worldview, the social contract is to create a government of a very specific nature, one whose purview is limited and whose duties are to the people (Locke, 1989).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau also gives his view on the State of nature and the social contract. Thus, for Rousseau, the State of nature is not a state of war but of freedom, and when man was still in this State, he was still simple. According to Rousseau, people in the State of nature are good and sociable, but Americans become wicked owing to society, especially because of property. Rousseau's idea is that the appearance of property and social difference results in competition and exploitation, thus leading to social conflict. According to Rousseau, the social contract is an agreement to form a collective 'general will' for the common good. In other words, if an individual's will aligns with the 'general will', people can be free and equal (Igben & TamBari, 2022).

Although each of the mentioned philosophers has a distinct vision of what the State of nature looks like, they all agree on the idea of forming a contract to get out of it. The nature of this contract and the type of government that this results in, however, differs in their theories, and this has to do with their respective outlooks on human nature and government.

3.2 Hobbes' View of a Strong Sovereign

Thomas Hobbes provides critical evaluations of human nature and the State of nature. In his *Leviathan*, Hobbes (1651) posits that the State of nature is defined by a war of all against all, with the primary motivation of individuals being the fear for their survival. In this condition, a central authority to maintain societal balance and enforce regulations against wrongdoers is absent, resulting in a society resembling a state of perpetual conflict – "bellum omnium contra omnes." Hobbes posits that lawlessness arises from individuals lacking the incentive to obey directives or consider the interests of their neighbors. This bleak depiction of the natural State aligns with Hobbes' perspective, which characterizes individuals as self-centered and motivated by survival instincts (Hobbes, 1651).

According to Hobbes, the sole means of escape from this State is for individuals to establish a covenant and surrender their rights to a supreme authority, referred to as the Sovereign. The sovereign, whether a king or parliament, possesses the authority to legalize and impose punishment, thereby deterring individuals from rejecting the legitimacy of a common government and reverting to a state of war. Hobbes posits that a state of war exists wherein all individuals conflict with one another; thus, the Sovereign must possess sufficient power to govern society effectively. Consequently, individuals must submit to the Sovereign without question, as any deviation may lead to reversing the State of nature characterized by war and instability (TUTUI, 2019).

In the context of Hobbes' social contract, a powerful sovereign is crucial in mitigating the dangers inherent in the State of nature. His viewpoint is authoritarian, asserting that the philosophical notion of sovereignty limits the

absolute power of an individual sovereign, which contradicts the primary justification for the social contract. Hobbes posits that the State's authority and the safety of its citizens take precedence over individual freedom; to avoid a state of war, individuals must adhere to the Sovereign's rule.

3.3 Locke's Limited Government and Protection of Natural Rights

John Locke provides a superior viewpoint on the concept of the State of nature compared to Hobbes. In his work, *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), Locke asserts that individuals in their natural state are equal and possess inherent rights to life, liberty, and property. According to Locke, these rights are natural rights that cannot be surrendered or transferred by others. According to Locke, the State of nature is devoid of war, contrary to Hobbes' definition; it is instead a condition where individuals can find one another and coexist based on their equal right to life.

Locke posits that individuals in the State of nature will voluntarily establish a government to safeguard their basic rights. According to Locke, the primary function of government is to protect fundamental rights, enabling persons to live freely and acquire property without obstruction. In contrast to Hobbes, Locke characterizes the government as limited, lacking absolute power. The government's responsibility is to serve the welfare of the populace; when it fails in this duty, the people possess the right to abolish it (Locke, 1989).

Theories of the social compact and the legitimacy of rebellion are a significant aspect of Locke's philosophy. Locke posits that if a government devolves into dictatorship or disregards the rights of its citizens, the populace is justified in uprising to dismantle the oppressive regime and establish a new one that serves their interests. This notion of the conditional nature of political power contrasts with Hobbesian principles, wherein sovereign authority is unchallenged and absolute. The concepts articulated by Locke, emphasizing human rights and governmental accountability, established the basis for contemporary liberal democratic philosophy concerning constitutional and legal frameworks (Boucher & Kelly, 2003).

3.4 Rousseau's Collective General Will and Freedom

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762) presents a more collectivist perspective on the concept of the social contract. In contrast to Hobbes and Locke, who assert that forming a political community arises from a contract, Rousseau posits that individuals are inherently natural, pure, and free, becoming corrupt only upon entering society and establishing private property. Rousseau introduces the concept of private property by highlighting the resulting inequality, competition, and exploitation, which lead to social contradictions. Rousseau presents a compelling depiction of the State of nature evolving into a disturbing reality with the advent of civilization.

It is important to note that, according to Rousseau, the social contract encompasses the establishment of a government and the formation of the legislature's 'general will.' Rousseau posits that individuals attain true freedom through participation in forming the general will, contingent upon aligning private wills with this collective will. This concept is significant in Rousseau's political philosophy, as it focuses on harnessing the general will of a collective.

We encounter another perspective, that of Rousseau, who, while not rejecting individualism as Hobbes did, introduced the concept of the collective to achieve freedom. According to Rousseau, individuals are considered unfree when motivated by self-interest; true freedom is achieved when actions are directed towards the public good. It can be concluded that, according to Rousseau, the State is obligated to serve the collective welfare of the community rather than the interests of individual citizens (Seabright et al., 2021).

The primary assumption in Rousseau's social contract theory is effectively demonstrated in contemporary democratic principles. His focus on the general will and the imperative to make decisions on behalf of the entire society has been interpreted as an advocacy for direct democracy, wherein individuals actively engage in the governance of their nation. Rousseau's inclination to prioritize collective interests over individual desires raises concerns regarding the potential for authoritarianism, as individual freedom may be entirely compromised for societal benefit (Seabright et al., 2021).

4. Hume's Political Skepticism: A Critique and Reconstruction of the Social Contract Theory

4.1 Hume's Critique of Key Assumptions in Social Contract Theory

David Hume, a further significant contributor to the socio-political philosophy, rejected the social contract theory according to the rationalist principles of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Hume discarded a prevalent social belief and argued it was a "fiction" in his 1748 publication, *Of the Original Contract*. In contrast to the works of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, which result from a contract concluded by individuals in the State of nature, political

societies are formations that do not result from reason's finding. Rather, these concepts result from historical developments influenced by customs, habits, and historical circumstances. Although Hume effectively integrated the concept of social contract into his thought process, he did not believe it was accurate to portray the process as a strictly cooperative affair that led to the formation of political societies (Brownsey, 1978).

Hume posits that the establishment of political systems is never truly influenced by various types of consent, even though the social contract theory attempts to provide a rational rationale for political power with some relevant consent from the people. Nevertheless, he asserted that political power is invariably acquired through force to establish control over a specific territory and that it is only later that this power is bolstered by the customs that have developed and evolved since that time. This critique is perhaps most consistent with Hume's general skepticism regarding the rationalist approach to elucidating human behavior, which he maintained was significantly more influenced by passions, customs, and passions than reason (Laursen 2011).

4.1.1 The "Historical Fiction" of the Contract

The initial criticism of the social contract theory is that it is based on the "historical fiction" of how Hume defined it. Hume asserts that there is no historical record of individuals establishing a society for political cooperation based on a contract. The "Social Contract Theory" posits that at some point in the past, individuals convened in a civilized manner to elect a government to safeguard their interests. This theory is the source of government. Hume asserted that political institutions are far from ideal and are the result of conquest, in which a dominator achieves supremacy and maintains rule through the right of capture and tradition. Throughout this process, individuals become accustomed to these institutions and ultimately embrace them as the executors of legitimate authority despite the absence of a formal social contract (Brownsey, 1978).

Hume presents the social contract as a hypothesis disregarding governments' true origin rather than as an instrument that aims to elucidate why specific political formats are appropriate. While animalistic instincts may provide insight into the evolution of subjection to a law or authority, a social contract is more effective in elucidating because individuals adhere to laws or obey those in power than the historical account of power's development. However, it is derived from the actual historical truth. One of the fundamental components of Hume's argument is the discrepancy between social contract theorists' rationalized appeal for political authority and the much messier, frequently aggressive world of political history.

4.1.2 The Over-Rationalization of Human Behavior

Hume initiated a critique of social contract theory based on his skeptical perspective regarding the role of reason in human behavior. Over two centuries ago, in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Hume dealt a significant blow to the rationalist movement by arguing that "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions." Hume contends that individuals' behaviors cannot be elucidated as originating from a process of intentional reasoning, as suggested by social contract theorists. He argues that individuals are motivated not by self-interest, logic, or related concepts such as utilitarianism and rationalism but by passions, including emotions like hatred and love, as well as the socially accepted rules of behavior. This notion of humanity paradoxically places this author in opposition to the Hobbesian, Lockean, and Rousseauism assumptions on individuals' capacity to reason, reflect on advantages and hazards, and establish agreements leading to the development of political communities.

Hume's rejection of the rationalist perspective of social contract theory prompts him to question the fundamental political authority derived from voluntary rational assent. In the social contract concept, individuals are presumed to consent to political governance to protect their rights and maintain order. However, Hume contends that political authority does not arise from such reasonable bargains. This arises from the institutionalization of daily social activities inside society. Once established, these behaviors appear legal and constitute ingrained behavioral patterns rather than being motivated by enforceable agreements, whether tacit or explicit in writing (Laursen, 2011)

4.1.3 The Real Foundation of Authority

According to Hume, the authentic source of sovereignty resides not solely in reason and its rationale but in custom. Over time, numerous political institutions are established, and when a society accepts these changes and recognizes the advantages of stability and order, they are perceived as legitimate by that society. For Hume, legitimacy is not derived from a contract among persons based on rational deliberation, implying that it is natural for people to see existing societal structures as inevitable. In this regard, Hume accurately asserts, "In societies where governments have been established for the longest duration, there exists the strongest justification for their support, as each new institution merely creates a disadvantage in the public's perception."

Hume emphasizes custom and habit as the foundation of political obligation, acknowledging social contract theory while rejecting rationalist assumptions. Consequently, Hume contends that legitimacy cannot be arbitrarily

constructed by reason derived from consent; rather, legitimacy develops incrementally as individuals become accustomed to the prevailing political structure. Consequently, through acclimatization within an organization, members progressively accept it as legitimate, even without an official memorandum or treaty (Laursen, 2011). Hume asserts that it is not the justice or equity of an organization that provides its legal power but rather its constancy.

4.2 Hume's Reconstruction: Custom and Stability as the Basis of Political Legitimacy

Hume does not reject the idea of political legitimacy despite rejecting the social contract theory based on reasonable agreement. He argues that tradition, practice, and historical progression are more reliable sources of political legitimacy. According to Hume, only when it ensures stability in authority and when people accustom themselves to obey it can political power be legitimate. According to Hume, political authority has substantial legitimacy regarding societal stability and security, in contrast to the social contract theorists, who appear to place great stress on reason and consent as the foundation for political systems (Laursen, 2011).

To emphasize, Hume's reimagining of political legitimacy is very pragmatic. He disagrees that notions of equality or justice must be legitimate political institutions. Rather than that, he centers his argument around continuity and gradualism. In Hume's view, revolutionary political change is nearly always harmful since it undermines established norms and breeds rudeness. As a result, political shifts, in Hume's view, should be progressive and respectful of the established political culture. So, in contrast to Rousseau and other liberal theorists, Hume offers a conservative take on the social compact idea in his theory of political legitimacy (Weber, 2009).

5. Reconstruction of Political Legitimacy

5.1 Political Legitimacy from Custom, Stability, and Emotional Foundations

David Hume's critique of social contract ideas facilitates his proposal of a completely distinct foundation for justifying political authority. The author of *The Britons* articulates a social contract theory that posits the convergence of individuals in a state of nature as the foundation for political authority, offering a comprehensive examination of an emotionally grounded basis for political legitimacy through established customs, stability, and attachment. In the political arena, Hume does not perceive political authority as originating from a question of reason. Instead, it is a phenomenon that arises organically from individuals' habitual compliance among a populace already acclimated to the existing social structure. Hume argued that political institutions obtain legitimacy from their ability to provide stability and continuity, leading individuals to accept these institutions as integral to their existence (Weber, 2009).

Hume's alternative to political legitimation endorses dependence on the wisdom of the populace and their customary practices in exercising authority. Consequently, rather than rationally acquiescing to the authority of political institutions, individuals adhere to them primarily because this behavior has become normalized. Over time, such institutions are deemed legitimate as they ensure order and stability within societies. Hume's perspective is based on a well-structured procedural approach, primarily aimed at preserving social prudence rather than endorsing revolutionary changes (Laursen, 2011).

Another aspect that characterizes Hume's conception of political legitimacy as predominantly emotional is his perspective on the nature of the political contract. In contrast to other Enlightenment political philosophers, Hume acknowledges the role of passion in political submission. Individuals often align themselves with specific political systems influenced by tradition, historical context, and their identification with the political framework of their community. The effects discussed clarify the legitimation of politics, as individuals are inclined to accept the authority that aligns with their cultural and historical heritage, a perspective I support, as noted by (Laursen, 2011).

Hume's framework is likely conservative, valuing the continuity of existing societal behavioral routines and structures. Political legitimacy cannot be artificially constructed through theoretical discourse or radical governmental changes. It is primarily a process that evolves, shaping social practices and beliefs. This conception of legitimate political power diverges from the theoretical frameworks of social contract theorists, who emphasize reason and consent by prioritizing political stability and continuity over justice and equality (Laursen, 2011).

5.2 Advocacy for Gradualism over Radical Change

One of the primary consequences of Hume's skepticism toward the rationalist principles of political authority is his opposition to revolutionary actions in the context of political system reform. Hume believed that political institutions should evolve progressively and follow the culture rather than being radically destined for revolution for the sake of high principle. Hume's gradualism is apparent, indicative of his conviction that stability and order are fundamental virtues in political life. He believes that revolutionary actions typically lead to social instability, vices, and, most significantly, violence (Singh & Kumar, 2024).

Hume firmly believed that political revolutions must occur progressively to respect the mildest and most comprehensible season for reforms. He believes revolutions are the most perilous option, as they would disrupt the mechanisms regulating human interactions within communities. During periods of radical change, such as the English Civil War or the French Revolution, Hume contended that the outcome is often more chaos and destruction than the lofty principles for which individuals fought. He regarded these change disturbances as unwarranted and detrimental, believing that they resulted in greater losses than benefits (Singh & Kumar, 2024).

Hume's gradualism is precisely that: Hume's gradualism is an integral component of his pragmatic approach to politics. He advocated for the development of politics according to the requirements of society rather than through the application of philosophical concepts. For instance, in this instance, his political philosophy is considerably more secular than religious, as it is more focused on practical outcomes. Consequently, Hume provides a more realistic liberal framework that acknowledges culture, customs, continuity, and, as a result, stability by focusing on sluggish, constant, and gradual changes and appealing to reason and moderation (Anderson, 2003).

Consequently, Hume's politics can be interpreted as a form of criticism of the social contract theory, in which Rousseau advocated for the reformation of society according to the collective will. Hume finds such modifications to the "frame of spice" to be excessively radical and, in fact, detrimental because social customs and habits serve as the foundation of stability. As a result, Hume presents a compelling argument for change as a gradual process that must consider the requirements and characteristics of the specific society rather than attempting to replace established political structures with what the philosopher refers to as abstract political arrangements in an attempt to replace current political structures (Anderson, 2003).

6. Hume's Political Skepticism and Its Influence on Modern Political Philosophy

6.1 Social Order, Political Authority, and Legitimacy as Products of Custom

David Hume's political skepticism profoundly influences contemporary political philosophy, particularly on authority, legitimacy, and social order. His dismissal of rationalist foundations undermines the social contract theory's aim of establishing political authority through rational consent. Instead of viewing political authority as derived from reason or contract, as other Enlightenment thinkers like Locke proposed, Hume asserts that political power originates from tradition. Over time, they acquire societal consciousness, and individuals perceive them as genuine societal institutions due to the natural process of social evolution (Weber, 2009).

Hume's emphasis on organicism for comprehending political authority leads to a significant critique of the abstract notions of justice and equality that characterize the contractarian political theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Unlike much political philosophy, Hume's notion of political legitimacy is grounded not in specific concepts but in the benefits of stability and continuity. Hume maintains that political institutions lack legitimacy when they adhere to notions of justice; rather, their legitimacy arises from serving the public interest and preventing societal disorder. This perspective has significantly influenced conservative thought in the modern era, favoring the preservation of current structures above revolutionary transformations (Weber, 2009).

6.2 Gradualism and the Avoidance of Radical Revolutions

One of Hume's most significant contributions to modern political philosophy is his advocacy for constancy, which he promoted in opposition to upheaval. Hume contended that political structures should be conservative, advocating for gradual change rather than radical upheaval or reform based on abstract ideals. This emphasis on crawling parallels Hume's cynicism over reason's capacity to guide political judgments.

In light of the current global political landscape, Hume warns against abrupt transformation, advocating instead for gradualism. Contemporary society is seeing political polarization and an increase in 'Revolutionary' attitudes, making Hume's warning against the perils of excessive political instability particularly relevant. He subsequently elucidated that such revolutions engender greater devastation and instability than the regime they aim to dismantle. Conversely, Hume advocated for political advancement that occurs incrementally, aligned with the cultural context of the respective society (Weber, 2009).

6.3 The Role of Emotions, Habits, and Culture in Shaping Political Decisions

Additionally, Hume's political skepticism identifies passions, repetition, and habit as the fundamental causes driving political activities, in contrast to the notion of rational calculation that influences individuals. Hume asserted that individuals are predominantly guided by their passions rather than by reason and certain moral ideals and social customs. This understanding of human nature significantly influences contemporary political philosophy, particularly concerning modern politics and political theory, and the insights provided by cultural and emotional domains about today's political landscape (Laursen, 2011).

Hume's analysis of human irrationality has significantly impacted various political science domains, particularly political culture and behavioral economics. Hume's critique of political philosophy significantly contributes to political science by emphasizing the centrality of habit and sensibility in shaping political systems and individuals' attitudes toward authority. This comprehension of the interplay among reason, passion, and culture persists in contemporary political debate, encompassing nationalism, populism, and tradition (Laursen, 2011).

7. Modern Relevance of Hume's Political Thought

7.1 Insights into Governance, Legitimacy, and Stability

David Hume's political skepticism offers significant insights into contemporary political issues about authority and stability. In contemporary democracies, political authority originates from the populace and represents the people's collective will. This reasoning is fundamental to the concept of 'democracy', which entails electoral and public participation in governance to maintain the legitimacy of governmental authority. However, based on Hume's critique, this perspective may be significantly lacking in thorough depiction. Hume asserts that while consent can be influenced, political regimes are sustained not by ongoing consent but by politicizing expectations. According to Hume, political legitimacy derives from rights established by previously agreed-upon practices and can persist even in the absence of contemporary affirmation by the populace (Landis, 2018).

This knowledge is particularly valuable for evaluating political stability in democracies and autocracies. In numerous third-world dictatorships, individuals bestow legitimacy upon the regime by endorsing prevailing social traditions and the political structure, even when the latter lacks democratic principles. Hume emphasized that political order and systems get legitimacy from stability and continuity rather than societal support. It is advantageous to examine how authoritarian regimes sustain their power and how democracies maintain societal cohesion despite fluctuations in public opinion (Anderson, 2003).

7.2 The Role of Gradual Social Change in Democratic Policymaking

Hume's two main ideas about politics—gradualism and the role of custom—are also good ways to think about how policies are made in democratic states. Hume's political doubt in the essay warns today's youth about the dangers of frequent political revolutions, which are often caused by increased political division. Hume thought that political change ideas should be slow and in line with old customs and ways of doing things, but not fast because that leads to instability. His belief that social relationships will change over time is a more solid and useful way to bring about change in political democracy than revolutionary action for changing these societies (Weber, 2009). After all these years, Hume's ideas are still helpful for policymakers, especially when they want to change the status quo, but the current situation is based on values like security and order.

8. Conclusion

David Hume's criticism of the social contract theory forms the foundation of many rationalist theories of political authority associated with Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau through a lens of skepticism. Hume overlooks monistic contractarianism, which posits that individuals unite to establish a government through reason. For him, politics emerge from convention, usage, and historical context. According to Hume, an argument from the right cannot be normative, as it does not stem from justice or rational consent; instead, the foundation of political legitimacy lies in tradition itself. This critique of social contract theory advocates for a more pragmatic and historically grounded understanding of the formation and maintenance of political authority.

In the essay's conclusion, Hume presents an alternative framework for evaluating political legitimacy, grounded in the principles of social stability and a gradualist approach. He advocates for positive political change that respects cultural practices and opposes violent transformations typical of revolutions. Rousseau anticipates a political revolution that empowers the masses, whereas Hume advocates for conservatism, positing that political change should occur gradually to preserve established institutions. The author's assertion regarding the role of custom and affection in strengthening political authority highlights irrational factors in human behavior that affect political decision-making and support for governments.

In contemporary political discourse, Hume's skepticism remains influential. His approach emphasizes custom and evolution rather than revolution, providing an alternative to the common radicalism demand for political upheaval. The impulsive nature and habituality perspective on political legitimacy offered by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers are valuable for analyzing the stability of both democratic and non-democratic states. Many contemporary political systems strive to balance change and order. In contrast, Hume's concepts of gradualism and the evolution of political realities offer a more realistic and stable approach. Hume's skepticism serves as a critical reminder to political theorists regarding the pitfalls of rationalism. As demonstrated in Book 3 of the *Treatise*, the master statesman illustrates how to navigate the politics of legitimacy, historically and in contemporary contexts, without

relying on the self's naturalism.

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