<u>Political Philosophy</u>

Political Philosophy is an investigation into the nature cause and effect of good and bad government. There are at least 3 factors
1   Good and bad government profoundly affect the quality of human lives
2   The form of government is not predetermined. We have a choice.
3   We can know what distinguishes good government from bad.
        We can trace the effects of different forms of government and learn what qualities go to make up the best form of government

The Social Contract, in Political Philosophy, is the concept of an actual or hypothetical compact or agreement between the ruler and the ruled defining the rights and duties of each.

Two philosophers who came up with their own ideas about social contract were Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Both were influenced by the way they were brought up and the background and times they lived. Hobbes, born in the 16th century, and living through the English Civil War (1641-2652) saw the need for a strong government to control what he saw as man's basic nature, "Life in the state of nature is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Rousseau, on the other hand was a product of the Age of Enlightenment and the growing demands for education and more equality, as reflected in his famous quote was "Man is born free but is everywhere in chains".

Given their backgrounds, they each saw the 'State of Nature' and 'The Purpose of Government' as very different' as shown in this comparison grid:

State of Nature

• The state of nature is a state of war. • No morality exists. • Everyone lives in a state of fear. • No-one is really free. • Men are equal as the weakest can kill the strong.	• Men in a state of nature are free and equal. • "Noble Savages" • Humans are good but have been corrupted by society • Civilisation corrupts men.

Purpose of Government

• To impose law and order to prevent the state of war. • Governments are designed to control, not necessarily represent. • Governments must be designed to protect people from themselves.	• To bring people into harmony. To unite them under the 'general will' (of the people). • Representation is not enough. Citizens must be actively involved. • Governments must be responsive and aligned with the 'general will'.

We looked at how both philosopher's ideas could give rise to absolutism.

Hobbes Leviathan was his main work. Here is an up to date illustration of the title page of this book

In a lockdown, we can see the essence of politics is still what Hobbes described: some people get to tell others what to do

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▲ Illustration: Ben Jennings/The Guardian

In Rousseau's case the General Will is found by the people being asked to accept or reject laws or general policies on the basis that it is beneficial for the community. They are not agreeing to propositions on the basis of their desires but are agreeing to ideas as expressions of the General Will. He believes that a majority in favour of a law on this basis expresses the General Will. Those that disagree are either ill-informed or looking after self-interest. They need to be persuaded that they have made a mistake of what is right for the community and hence for themselves, in Rousseau words they need to be 'forced to be free'.