

Rousseau and Burke on the French Revolution

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Introduction

Jean-Jacque Rousseau and Edmund Burke, both were the most influential philosophers of politics during the 18th century. Despite the fact that both men lived during the same era, both men's views on philosophy were totally different from each other. In fact, both philosophers were on opposite sides, sharing absolutely opposite political views from each other. Burke favored the traditions of France, which is why he opposed the French Revolution. On the other hand, Rousseau was strongly in favor of revolution and even declared a hero during the revolution who was in favor of liberty.

The reason behind their [contradictory views](#) can be seen during the French Revolution, which can tell their struggle against each other. Burke believed that countries stayed together due to traditions, but Rousseau believed that people should be liberated and that they didn't need any power to govern them. These two opposite views made them famous among those who shared the same views, and that's the reason both of them were famous and influential during the same time period. Furthermore, the analysis discussion will critically analyze both the theories and the critique on the contradiction of philosophies from the perspective of that time.

Discussion

The aspects presented by Rousseau, which were his philosophy, contradicted Burke's idea that people are free because he believed that it's in their nature to be free. The second aspect, which is also completely opposite Burke's philosophy, is equality and liberty. Even when we go back to the Stone Age, we see that there weren't any traditions and beliefs people held. Life back then consisted of hunting and food gathering, which was the basis for measuring equality, eventually making them feel equal with a centralized system of no other societal stature. During those times, people were not accountable to anyone and didn't have to answer to higher authorities for their actions. The family was only the exception because they belonged to each other. This liberty of not answering gave them the sense of being free humans, and this was the criteria for measuring that they all were equal, which made them free and individualistic in nature. Plato also was in the favor of equality among both men and women, he also emphasized on the same work will categorize the people as equal (Plato, 32). When there is no outside force that can harm the people, that's the reason they don't have to form groups to protect each other. According to Rousseau, after the development of private property rights and reasons, the people are facing difficulties and inequality because these rights are being

exploited by the dominating class. He wasn't suggesting going back to old times, but the evil that was brought about by all these developments was because the rise in population required the building of a hierarchy to manage them. When the hierarchy came into place, inequality took birth among people. He suggested making the practical approach as people believe that reason is a positive thing, so go back to equality and freedom through reason. All these views by Rousseau were against the French queen, Marie Antoinette, because her acts put the people of France in misery and poverty, and her indifference towards people took away their liberty. There wasn't equality left during those times (Rousseau, 53).

On the other side, Burke's modern conservative ideology was based on traditional values, and he suggested that stability could be secured by societal norms and staying in groups as a community. As nature was the core of Rousseau's philosophy, Burke also developed his political philosophy based on nature. He explained nature by dividing into two parts, the first one refers to the stability which can be get from the family because of love and attachment. The second part refers to the habits and customs that people follow to secure their position in society. His philosophy revolved around the traditions that people get from the generations that have passed, and he suggested holding on to that tradition and passed on to generations. According to him, those traditions and norms are the only source of stability, which was against the idea of modernism. The other aspect of his philosophy was also badly criticized, which has no practicality. He suggested that abstract philosophy cannot be grounded in reality, and rather, he suggested people come up with solutions to current problems and try to fit into the solutions because those solutions fit into time. Burke cruised the French Revolution because he saw the revolution which would take the society back to scratch. He suggested following the leaders as they ask the people because they decide what is good for the people and for the present time. Burke's view on the new political system showed that he was against the change (Burke, 46). The new system will be by men, but the traditional system, which was given by the generation that was passed, was strong because of the survival of that system. Aristotle presented the views which contradicts Burke, the philosophy was that a man should be sufficient to himself and if he is not he will be ruled by society (Aristotle, 22).

Rousseau's strong views on radical philosophy were entirely different from Burke's views because they were purely emphasized on the traditions and values. Rousseau did not believe in the views of Burke and criticized them based on how old they were and how outdated they were, which can't be applied anymore because they were against the liberty of people and democracy. The equality that Rousseau wanted to give people was what Burke thought would be unrealistic and would grow the revolution. Burke favored the queen, and he defended her by emphasizing that her decisions were right and people should follow them (Herber, 12). Rousseau's remarks suggested that men were born free, but society had set the chains that should be set free by implementing a new political ideology system. Burke's views were old and carried only the old system of politics in which there was no equality and freedom. Rousseau believed religion was the worst institution because religion never helped the people. In fact, he suggested that the state only took benefit from religion. These views suggested that he was against the religious system because he expressed his anger that God's words are used by the legislature to claim that the actions of the government are justified.

The interesting thing about Burke is that he wasn't against the American Revolution but only against the French Revolution, which showed that his philosophy was only defending the Queen rather than any good he wanted for the people. His own remarks contradicted his political philosophy. Regarding the French Revolution, he was against the nation growing from scratch. Still, when it came to the American Revolution, he emphasized that America should get freedom from colonists and start from scratch. Burke supported the French Revolution even though people became poor, and all this was because of the French queen Marie Antoinette's lavish lifestyle (Chrisman-Campbell, 18).

Conclusions

In the end, the conclusive remarks on both political philosophies from the most influential philosophers are that both contributed significant knowledge and theories in the philosophy of politics, which were supported and criticized as well. Both philosophers somehow lacked some points and flawed in their own way, one lacked that sometimes people needs guidance and other was lacing the freedom of people sometimes. The points presented by them were valid on running the country, but Rousseau's views about liberty, freedom, and equality are strongest as compared to Burke's philosophy on the French Revolution. He wasn't against the American Revolution but only against the French Revolution, which showed that his philosophy was defending the Queen rather than any good he wanted for the people. His own remarks contradicted his political philosophy. Rousseau's views were not just the philosophy he presented, but those views were supported by history. Rousseau believed that religion is the worst institution because religion never helped the people. In fact, he suggested that the state only took benefit from religion. According to Rousseau, after developing private property rights and reasons, the people face difficulties and inequality because these rights are being exploited by the dominating class. He wasn't suggesting going back to old times, but the evil brought about by all these developments was because the rise in population required the building of a hierarchy to manage them. History can give several pieces of evidence of nations with strong democracies that have always progressed. Still, Burke's view contradicted the rights of people to be free because people of any country should decide what is best for them. Stability can be achieved through hard work, whether from the old system or new, so the scratch which Rousseau suggested favored the people of France against the rule of the Queen.

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