**What are the *Social Contract* and the *Federalist Papers* and what is their influence?**

Research Paper

Samuel Gest

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

II. Facts

III. Bias

IV. The books summarized

a. The Social Contract

i. Author

ii. Setting

b. The Federalist Papers

i. Author

ii. Setting

V. Their effects

VI. Continued role

VII. Conclusion

VIII. Bibliography

Abstract

Through the medium of literature man has been able to communicate with society and break barriers that inhibit a world of harmony. *Social Contract* and the *Federalist Papers* are incredibly important to American and French history. The principles written about in these pieces have overthrown corrupt governments, outlined the roles governments should and should not undertake, and are essential to the underpinnings of American and French society. Throughout the research there are: direct quotes from the pieces, in-depth analysis by historian professionals, and explanations made easily understood. *Social Contract’*s author, Jean Jacque Rousseau, states authority over men must be cautiously implemented and always have the people as the center focus. The *Federalist Papers* were mainly written to argue in favor of the ratification of the US Constitution. The collection of essays laid the framework of how the government should look like in reality not just in theory, however, it does not define each specific role down to a tee. Rousseau’s concepts were inter-woven in the *Federalist Papers* and are still used in defense of revolutions even today. Since the world is so volatile the ideas, as seen in *Social Contract* and the *Federalist Papers*, are of increased importance to maintain stability.

Introduction

Throughout history, literature has made its mark on every civilization that ever existed. Asim Farooq, an accredited author on historical literature said “Everybody agrees that literature is something that stands the test of time and can entertain, inspire and educate for eternity.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Because literature is usually defined as man’s way of communicating with society and breaking barriers, great examples of literature tend to leave scars on society. The *Social Contract* and the *Federalist Papers* are two examples of non-fiction that have changed civilization.

The *Social Contract’s* and *the Federalist Papers’* principles have been used to overthrow corrupt governments, establish a new constitution, and plea for ratification. Both are highly influential in United States’ and French history and were causes of great tension. After their creation there have been many supporting documents and additions to the original papers. The lessons taught in these two compilations are imperative if one is going to understand the underpinnings of American history and the French Revolution.

("Social Contract - Philosophy - Quotes." *The-Philosophy - Philosophy & Philosophers*. Web. 20 Dec. 2011. http://www.the-philosophy.com/tag/social-contract)

Facts

The authentic title of the social contract theory is *Of The Social Contract, Or Principles of Political Right*. It was originally written in French and called *Du contarc social ou Principes du droit politique*. The author was Jean-Jacques Rousseau; he wrote the *Social Contract* at age 50. *Social Contract* was self-published in 1762. Sixteen years after his death Rousseau was interred as a French national hero for his work, inparticular for authoring the *Social Contract*. “The idea of *Social Contract* has ancient origin but was not fully developed until the 17th and 18th centuries by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and finally, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Rousseau as well as his counterparts were very influenced by Niccole Machiavelli’s *The Prince*.

The *Federalist Papers* were published in succession in The Independent Journal and The New York Packet between October 1787 and August 1788. There first appearance to the public was through these newspapers, which had to be widely reprinted but later the essays were collected in two volumes and published in March of 1788.[[3]](#endnote-3) The authors are James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay. All of these authors were Americans, born in the British colonies in North America and then became citizens of the United States of America when independence was claimed. All of the authors were in support of the ratification of the United States Constitution and helped draft the document. Madison, in fact, is known as the “father of the American Constitution.” All of the authors had careers in the political arena after the publishing of the *Federalist Papers* including the presidency, Supreme Court justice, and life-long commitment to benefit the US.

("The Federalist Papers." *American Studies @ The University of Virginia*. Web. 20 Dec. 2011. http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/FEDERAL/frame.html)

The Social Contract

The *Social Contract* begins with an often quoted line from Rousseau’s first chapter: “Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains.”[[4]](#endnote-4) Man can be enslaved by numerous restraints. There are establishments that hold individuals down, establishments that lift certain individuals up and establishments that are more harmful than helpful. Men can be enslaved by incurring debts, by doing criminal actions, and unjustly incarcerated by corrupt governments. For example, in the US, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) takes money from individuals to pay for social programs that they may or may not utilize. Through taxes every citizen is in bondage to fund the government.

A nation and a state are interchangeable in our society but by definition they are different. A state is a sovereign, governed entity with borders and is recognized by other states. A nation, however, refers to a community of people who share a common language, culture, ethnicity, descent, and history. There are many instances in which a state is in conflict with the nation of its people. Such as in Rwanda in 1994, when an ethnic genocide occurred. Man can also be bonded by birth into a race or ethnic group.

Rousseau, a Frenchman who lived from 1712 to 1778, was active at the climax of the French Revolution. Rousseau believed the idea that law, specifically the laws implemented by the French king and queen of the time, was nothing more than a device to protect the wealth of the wealthy and to rationalize the abuse of the poor. For this reason Rousseau was adored by both the moderate and extreme reformists. The book’s basic claim was that human beings formed a social contract to society, they gave authority to a government while maintain their right of soverginity and the power to withdraw that authority when necessary. The number one role of government, during this time and still today, was to provide security to its citizens. If a government cannot secure its borders or people it is defective enough to be rebuked. If a government is deliberately harming to its citizens there needs to be a revolution. If a country is involved in prolonged military efforts without the backing of the people, the people should urge the government to withdraw. The trend is that the government should only be an extended arm that promotes the wants and needs of the citizens of the country.

Rousseau’s ideas are studied by every government student in the US; he sought to head a movement that placed supreme faith on the powers of reason. It was controversial because it suggested that the heads of state ruled only by their subjects’ consent. The power of reason uses logic to solve all problems. Rousseau also had much to say about religion and how it seemed to convolute any situation. He saw religion as an unnecessary gray area. If Rousseau were alive when scientology came about he would likely support that.

“*Social Contract* is one of the most influential political treatises of all time. Hardly a measure was framed in the early part of the French Revolution which does not bear the mark of this 'Bible of democratic government,' as it [*Social Contract*] has been styled," says Robert Ergang, [[5]](#endnote-5) a Eurpean historian.

We are indebted to Rousseau for the way of life we enjoy today. European Enlightenment thinkers were fascinated by the way monarchies could keep their rule without caring about the people’s freedom and get away with it. Thinkers like Rousseau were amazed that until then no one had ever contested the aristocrats.

People are required to give up their wills to government in order for government to succeed. There has to be, at absolute minimum, an unwavering trust between the two parties: the people and government. The general will of the people need to be protected by the government; however, this is easier said than done. When a disconnect arises it is time to implement the social contract theory and revolt. Rousseau fought for fairness and knew the hardships of the peasant life. But he personally would not be involved in revolution because he too was part of the social elite by the time of the French Revolution. Instead he would fuel the flames with his philosophical writings.

Rousseau further developed his ideas by saying the people under a government had the right, and obligation, to overthrow the government if or when the government became too corrupt to tolerate and no longer held the people at the heart of their policies.[[6]](#endnote-6) The creators of democracy the Greeks, Plato, Socrates, and the Romans had social contract in their heads when they formed the first democracy in ancient Greece and ancient Rome they just did not have “consent of the governed’ written down or fully developed. Thomas Jefferson also exalted this idea and used it as a key argument for the Declaration of Independence. It’s impossible to have a republic without a connection between the representative body and the people, or else there is no purpose in representative democracy. Representatives have to work hard to express the attitudes of the people in government. Government and the people have to fulfill their moral obligations toward each other and a consensus must be met, or else the people will have to revolt.

The Federalist Papers

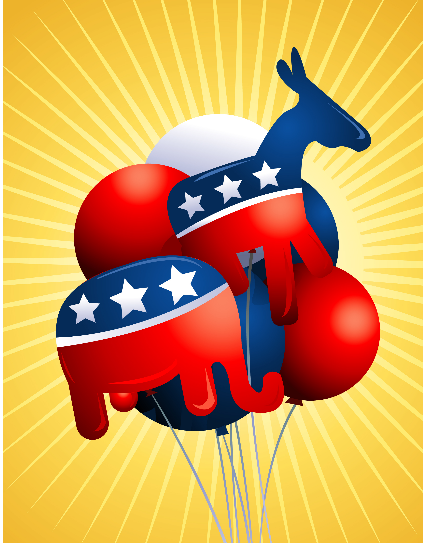
*The Federal Papers*, essays which appeared in a New York newspaper editorials in October 1787 was much more accepted than the *Social Contract*. The aim of the papers was to thrust the Constitution to ratification. After the members of the Constitutional Convention drafted the US Constitution the states needed to ratify it, meaning make it the new supreme document of the US. The papers consisted of 85 essays, which argued in strong support for the ratification of the Constitution. It was mostly directed at the state of New York because New York was a swing vote during this volatile time. New York was the only state to abstain from voting for independence. In New York ties to the British was much stronger than in the other colonies. The *Federalist Papers’* impact resonated through all states once it was published. *The Federalist Papers* have three authors, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay. The collection of essays is considered to be the most important articulations of American political philosophy to this date.[[7]](#endnote-7)

The *Federalist Papers* are considered the first complete combination of the ideals of justice, general welfare, and individual rights in a logical, substantial, and realistic arrangement.[[8]](#endnote-8) These essays are viewed with awe and esteem by all American historians. The institution that was in place was the American government which at the time was a set of rules mainly aimed to the interests of the landowning white males and the new constitution did not erase this problem, it provided the first steps towards equality.

Alexander Hamilton, a loose constructionist of the constitution was extremely influential in American politics. Hamilton was George Washington’s secretary during the American Revolution and then served as a delegate to the Continental Congress, representing the state of New York.[[9]](#endnote-9) Hamilton was a key founder of the Federalist Party; he supported a strong, centralized government. Hamilton was key to point out the beneficial implications of a national bank, or treasury department as we now know it. Hamilton wrote a majority of the essays but Madison wrote the ones which receive the most attention and disagreement.

James Madison, a Virginian by birth later became the fourth president of the United States. Madison is called “the father of the U.S. Constitution”, which explains his immediate assistance toward ushering the ratification. Madison was an insightful political thinker who agreed with Alexander Hamilton that the United States needed a strong, centralized government.[[10]](#endnote-10) Madison had a great impact on Virginia’s state government before moving onto the national level. Madison also helped draft the Bill of Rights while a member of the House of Representatives in 1789.

John Jay only wrote five essays and his influence in the Federalist Papers was cut short due to illness; Hamilton and Madison were full steam into the publication by this time. Jay helped draft the state constitution of New York and negotiate the Treaty of Paris with Benjamin Franklin in 1783.[[11]](#endnote-11) John Jay was elected the President of the Continental Congress and later became the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Each article discussed different philosophies and/or sections of our political system. The most famous of the *Federalist Paper* are numbers *10* and *51*. Without these papers the passage of the U.S. Constitution may never have occurred. When you want to thank someone for our political system or when you want to yell at someone; it would be these guys. The papers are justifiably some of the most influential books to shape the U.S. political system.[[12]](#endnote-12)

*Federalist Paper #10* is written by James Madison and perhaps the most famous of the *Federalist Papers*. Madison states the strongest arguments in favor of the Constitution is that this government is capable of controlling the violence and damage caused by factions. Madison’s biggest enemy is factions. He defines that factions are groups of people who gather together to protect and promote their special interests and sway political opinions. To him, a government that can control factions and work with public interests and not infringe upon the rights of the people is ideal.

*Federalist Paper #51* explains the importance of the Separation of Powers. In *Federalist Papers #48-50* neither popular conventions nor referenda are the solutions to the problem of departments infringing on other departments. The solution consists rather in "so contriving the interior structure of the government as that its several constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places,” which is a direct quote from *Federal Paper #51[[13]](#endnote-13)*. A true Separation of Powers is an extraordinary achievement. The security of separation of powers in practice must depend on the willingness of men to take extreme action--such as risking one's life in defense of the Constitution. Madison has a lot to say about "the interior structure of the government." In spite of his reluctance, he presents some of the most important characteristics of modern constitutional democracy. Madison is so kind to us that he concisely sums up his thoughts in this sentence: "Each department should have a will of its own; and consequently should be so constituted that the members of each should have as little agency as possible in the appointment of the members of the other." [[14]](#endnote-14)

Their effects

Rousseau’s *Social Contract* was of great importance to the consensus and principles behind the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence. The *Social Contract* was a progressive work that helped inspire political reforms or revolutions in Europe, especially in France and then the United States. *Social Contract* was essentially a document that would lay the foundation of all grassroots movements where the people are the focus. Not all revolutions are beneficial to society but revolutions spurred by the *Social Contract* were a social movement supported by the masses.

According to Rousseau, justice is not be defined as "the right of the strongest"or the power of some individuals to gain advantage over others. Justice cannot be defined as the will of the most powerful individuals because they will not always be the most just and morally right. Moreover, justice must be the force behind every authority or else people will not trust authority. Authority is to be equal or better than the will of people. The demand for an individual to comply will be no obligation if this occurs. Thus, the question of whether justice can be achieved in society may not depend on whether individuals can be forced to comply with civil authority but on whether individuals and civil authority can act in harmony with each other. Furthermore, there is a moral obligation to comply with civil authority only if that authority is legitimate.

Rousseau’s theory gained momentum in France during the 18th century but was not fully appreciated just yet. In England and Germany, Rousseau had a greater impact. His works were not easily accepted by the other great philosophers of the time. He did, however, impress the French communist philosophers which had just started developing their ideas. There is no denying the fact that the French revolutionaries read Rousseau and walked away with justification for a democratic-authoritarian form of government. But this was not the intention of Rousseau; his works of literature are easily misread and misunderstood. He wishes all citizens to be equal and not to have a central authoritarian government. [[15]](#endnote-15) Which is not to say he promotes a unitarian government lead by a singe individual.

The *Federalist**Papers*state that Congress needs to have a "stability of character” to perform their jobs effectively. The people need to be able to trust congress. However, today, Congress has a shockingly low approval rating (nine percent)[[16]](#endnote-16). Since the typical approval rating was 30 percent, there must be something flawed in the US’s current condition. Madison, Hamilton, and Jay would have heart attacks if they saw how partisan and unsuccessful Congress is today. They probably would have written another 85 essays on how to change the way the legislative branch is being run. Partisanship does not have a beneficial end to it. Partisanship causes gridlock and compromise is often thrown out the window. Factions that Madison spent much time writing about are as evil as he said they could be. With that said though can you imagine where we would be if we did not have the *Federalist Papers*? It’s hard to say exactly what America would look like without the *Federalist Papers* but it is unconceivable to say that we would be better or equal to the current situation today.

The stability of Congress is dependent on the separation of powers and checks and balances system. These are only briefly described in the Constitution but are more indepthly clearified in the *Federalist Papers*. The *Federalist Papers* have sown together the fabric that is the political scene in America. At the time of their conception the *Federalist Papers* was like a bonding-agent that furthered unity between the States and the national government. The relationship between the states and national government was extremely touch and go during America’s early life stages.[[17]](#endnote-17) The *Federalist Papers* outlines but did not define to a tee the roles of each department the national government is allowed to establish.

Rousseau would agree with Madison’s statement that the government must be able to control the people. Although he stresses individual rights and if the government is unable to control its citizens there is no point of it. Minority rights are important on lesser political issues, unlike liberty or individual rights.

Continued role

Although *Social Contract* theory has evolved over centuries, it became a dominant moral and political theory in the 19th century. It was very influential throughout the political history of Europe and the early United States. In recent times, philosophers, particularly those who are feminists and race-conscious, have criticized social contract theory as being a simplistic picture of society. They argue that it may even lead to inequality of rights.[[18]](#endnote-18)

The Social Contract has had a large impact on US forge in policy. Since Truman’s Communist Containment forward the US has taken the self-appointed role as the world policeman. The US uses Rousseau’s argument that a government should derive power from the people for the people. Thus, Social Contract is a fuel behind the US’s foreign policy.

Around the 1960 through the 1980 a man named John Rawls has revived and re-edited the social contract theory and restored it to the center of contemporary political philosophy. [[19]](#endnote-19) The principles that Rawls believes would find acceptance are the principles of equal, liberty, and the common good. Rawl is the author of the *Theory of Justice*. But even Rawl thinks Rousseau did a good job with the *Social Contract* and if people could only understand his position without confounding the truths, governments would be all around better.

Politics today have varied in some ways from what Rousseau knew. There is an increasing emphasis on human associations, the activities of interests groups, and the policy making method. Rousseau’s principles are possibly more relevant to the basic operations of government, however, no matter how complicated the political situation a country is in, the populace’s wants are generally simple and straightforward which maintains the relevance of the *Social Contract* theory.

The *Federalist Papers* are a defense of the American system of government, as well as a classic practical application of political principles, these ideals have stood the test of time and have had an immensely beneficial impact on the US. The world often changes with frightening speed and never at opportune times, however the Constitution has stood like a beacon through the toughest storms and the political messages in the *Federalist Papers* backs the original framework and gives it even more integrity.

Conclusion

*Social Contract* is the theory that consent of the governed is a real, tangible thing. The people will not stand for unjust treatment; therefore the government ought to be cautious of their actions. A government should not necessarily heed to its citizens out of fear, rather a government should always have the people as the focus. Rousseau has set out the outline of what the relationship between a government and the people should look like. If authority is based on a fair and just agreement among the members of society there should be no conflict.

Concurrently the *Federalist Papers* are a set of documents that have shaped the development of the United States government in many ways. Their authors set out with a goal of fostering support for the ratification of the Constitution. The spread of these documents through the states garnered the support needed and furthered the publicity of the Constitution enough so that Americans united and ratified the Constitution. This goal was accomplished by a clear description of how the newly found American government would be different from the tyrannical government of England.

In many ways, the *Federalist Papers* and the *Social Contract* have influenced the way the United States Constitution is interpret and implement. By setting the tone of future American political culture, these manuscripts represent the birth of American politics and government as we know it today. Separation of Powers, Enumerated and Reserve Powers, and the rise of political parties, referred to as factions in the *Federalist Papers*, have firm roots relating to the *Social Contract*. Unfortunately, most Americans today are ignorant of these documents. For a country so proud of its heritage, political culture, and government, a huge number of citizens of the United States do not know the origins of their political society.

Thankfully, things change with time. Today, high school students around the country are required to take politics and government courses. In these classes, the importance of the *Social Contract* and the *Federalist Papers* are rightfully being elaborated on. As time passes, the people will become more aware, the citizens will become more involved, and the ideal American political society as envisioned by the Founding Fathers will slowly become a reality.

Although our political participation outlook is not good and voter turnout is a gloomy statistic, the US is still full of highly driven, smart, and politically minded citizens. There is still a hope and faith that the US will maintain our status in the world for centuries to come. What must happen is a sharp rise in education standards, a refinance and balance of our enormous budget, and a change in our global appearance. These things will be very difficult to achieve without an understanding of our rich history, which is marked by the *Federalist Papers* and the *Social Contract* in many ways.

1. "The Importance of the History of Literature." Internet Guide - Web Directory. Web. 19 Dec. 2011. <http://www.iguides.org/articles/articles/85/1/The-importance-of-the-history-of-Literature/Page1.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Lindfors, Bernth R. "World Authors Study." *Gale - Home*. Gale- Online Database. Web. 04 Jan. 2012. <http://www.gale.cengage.com/servlet/ItemDetailServlet?region=9>. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. KERMIT L. HALL. "Federalist, The." The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States. 2005. *Encyclopedia.com.* 4 Jan. 2012 <http://www.encyclopedia.com>. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. "Social Contract Theory [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy]." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Web. 07 Dec. 2011. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/#SH2c>. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ergang, Robert. *Europe From the Renaissance to Waterloo.* Boston: D. C. Heath. 1954 with revised bibliography; originally published in 1954. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. "Rousseau, Jean-Jacques [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy]." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Web. 27 Oct. 2011. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/rousseau/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. "Federalist Papers." *Founding Fathers*. Web. 27 Oct. 2011. <http://www.foundingfathers.info/federalistpapers/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. "Federalist papers." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 04 Jan. 2012. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/203506/Federalist-papers>. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. "Alexander Hamilton." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 04 Jan. 2012. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/253372/Alexander-Hamilton>. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ketcham, Ralph. "Madison, James." Presidents: A Reference History. 2002. *Encyclopedia.com.* 4 Jan. 2012 <http://www.encyclopedia.com>. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. "John Jay." Encyclopedia of World Biography. 2004. Retrieved January 04, 2012 from Encyclopedia.com: http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404703289.html [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. "The Federalist Papers | James Madison - James Madison's Montpelier... Restore Montpelier, Rediscover Madison." *James Madison's Montpelier - Restore Montpelier, Rediscover Madison*. Web. 27 Oct. 2011. <http://www.montpelier.org/explore/james\_madison/federalist\_papers.php>. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Thomas. "The Federalist Papers." THOMAS (Library of Congress). Library of Congress. Web. 11 Jan. 2012. <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed\_04.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. "The Federalist Papers Study Guide : Summary and Analysis of Essay 51 | GradeSaver." Study Guides & Essay Editing | GradeSaver. Web. 09 Dec. 2011. <http://www.gradesaver.com/the-federalist-papers/study-guide/section17/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Kreis, Steven. "Lecture 19: The French Revolution and the Socialist Tradition: EarlyFrench Communists (1)." *The History Guide -- Main*. Web. 20 Dec. 2011. <http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/lecture19a.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. "RealClearPolitics - Election Other - Congressional Job Approval." RealClearPolitics - Opinion, News, Analysis, Videos and Polls. Real Clear Politics. Web. 11 Jan. 2012. <http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/congressional\_job\_approval-903.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. "Overview of United States Government." *American History From About*. Web. 21 Dec. 2011. <http://americanhistory.about.com/od/governmentandpolitics/a/amgovoverview.htm>. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Student, Barbara DillbeckGraduate. "Social Contract (The) (Informational Paper)." Learning to Give. Web. 09 Dec. 2011. <http://learningtogive.org/papers/paper222.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. "John Rawls." Political Philosophy. Web. 07 Dec. 2011. <http://www.politicalphilosophy.info/rawls.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)