

# Evolution of State Purpose

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the purpose(s) of a state. The central idea is that the formation of the state is the result of the superposition and interaction of multiple factors, with the original purpose of enhancing productivity and thus overcoming the limitations of the state of nature, followed in the course of time by the imposition of additional goals and functions. That is to say, the evolution of the conception of the state itself reflects the far-reaching influence of the conceptual impetus on the functions of the state. In this paper, I also analyze and compare the defense of the legitimacy of the state from the instrumentalist and constructivist perspectives in the light of the views of several political philosophers, and hence further explore the purpose of the state.

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Before formally beginning, let's first clarify the definitions of a few specialized terms. In the introduction, I mentioned the concept of "legitimacy." I believe that legitimacy is a non-quantifiable criterion for measuring whether a political regime is recognized. Once legitimacy is established, one group can dominate another without encountering resistance from the dominated group. I define this ability to exercise legitimate control over others as "authority." Building upon this, an organization gradually takes shape and evolves into a "state." Throughout history, legitimacy has had various sources. For instance, in the pre-modern East Asian cultural sphere, the source of legitimacy

was often based on Fatong (dynastic tradition). Fatong fundamentally derived from Tianming, the mandate of heaven. Tianming was considered sacred and unchallengeable, and rulers were required to wield power in accordance with it. This notion was particularly significant in ancient Chinese monarchies, where rulers bearing the title Tianzi (Son of Heaven) were perceived as divinely appointed and held a markedly elevated status above ordinary individuals. During the transition of dynasties, the new ruling power might inherit certain ideological aspects from the preceding dynasty to acquire "Fatong," which is often associated with Confucian thought. This phenomenon is rooted in events from the Han Dynasty. Emperor Wu of Han (reigned from 156 BC to 87 BC), acting on the advice of Dong Zhongshu, designated Confucianism as the dominant ideology while suppressing other schools of thought (134 BC). The Confucian ideology of each dynasty often underwent modifications to align with ruling needs. In China's final feudal dynasty, the Qing Dynasty, Confucianism had evolved significantly from its original form in the late Spring and Autumn Period, incorporating elements of Legalism, Daoism, Buddhism, and more. Similarly, in pre-modern Europe within the Christian cultural sphere, there existed a concept akin to Fatong. In 313 AD, Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus, known as Constantine the Great, issued the Edictum Mediolanense, signaling the gradual decline of the Roman mythological system based on DII CONSENTES. Christianity provided a foundation of legitimacy for European political powers. For example, the Merovingian Dynasty, the first dynasty of the Franks, converted to Roman Orthodoxy, a pattern continued by the Carolingian Dynasty and the Holy Roman Empire, which adopted Roman Orthodoxy as the state religion. Almost a millennium later, Louis XIV further bolstered the divine right of kings, asserting that the monarch was God's representative, holding divine dominion over the state and its subjects. Based on these, I contend that pre-modern political legitimacy was largely grounded in religion or kinship, the latter essentially being an extension of the former, as the legitimacy passed down through bloodlines ultimately traced back to religious origins. With the advent of the Enlightenment, the process of modernization for states began. The rise of rationalism in society marked the first significant challenge to the spiritual authority of the Ecclesia Catholica. It's noteworthy that although skepticism toward the divine authority existed in the pre-modern era, the substantial secularization processes capable of unsettling the position of the Ecclesia Catholica were manifestly expressions of modernity. The emergence of the new deity of "Rationality" weakened the legitimacy of the divine right of kings, prompting Enlightenment thinkers to propose the social contract theory as an alternative foundation. Though some were founded on the reforms, states founded on this theory commonly rose from the ashes of their predecessors, as people, through revolutions, overthrew former regimes to establish new states based on the social contract. The First French

Republic serves as an example. However, in most cases of such states, the social contract was not collectively signed by all citizens; rather, it was drafted by representatives of the people. It's essential to clarify that the states ostensibly founded by the people were established by an "elite" possessing independent thought, with the majority of the populace contributing material support to this intellectual force. In the East, the modernization process lagged significantly behind the West. China's transition from a divine right monarchy to a social contract-based state occurred in 1949 with the establishment of the Communist Party of China. Confusingly, beyond these two types of states, there are also instances where countries blend democratic governance and royal authority to establish legitimacy. How should such hybrid states be classified? Modern-day Britain exemplifies this scenario. While the Windsor Dynasty ostensibly rules Britain, the specific administrative directives are issued by the parliament. It is vital to clarify that democracy does not equate to the social contract. Democracy and the social contract share some common ground, but they are not entirely synonymous. States founded on the social contract can be either democratic or centralized in their structure. Hobbes and Rousseau are both proponents of the social contract theory, yet their notions of government's concrete form differ significantly. Britain is essentially a hybrid state, drawing its authority from a combinate of sources. The legitimacy of Britain has two primary origins: the unification of Anglo-Saxons in 829 and the Glorious Revolution. Consequently, beyond the aforementioned two types of states, a third category must be added – states that blend both methods of justifying state authority. With this, I've outlined the concept of legitimacy and classified methods by which states demonstrate their legitimacy.

So, given these factors, what then constitutes the origin of a state? And how does a state establish its authority?

The origin of the state is essentially an interdisciplinary issue, the inquiry of which needs to be approached from the perspectives of several disciplines, including history, sociology, political science, anthropology, etc. This paper adopts Fukuyama's anthropological explantation of the origin of the state. In the earliest stages of human society, during the band-level organizational phase, individuals resided within small, relatively egalitarian communities typically composed of a few dozen individuals. These communities characterized themselves by high autonomy and spontaneity, with minimal hierarchies or power differentials. Close bonds were formed primarily through familial relationships, particularly matrilineal ties. While such an organizational structure effectively addressed the needs of small groups, its limitations became more apparent with population growth. In the earliest stages of human society, during the band-level organizational phase, individuals resided within small, relatively egalitarian communities typically composed of a few dozen individuals. These communities characterized

themselves by high autonomy and spontaneity, with minimal hierarchies or power differentials. Close bonds were formed primarily through familial relationships, particularly matrilineal ties. While such an organizational structure effectively addressed the needs of small groups, its limitations became more apparent with population growth. The origins of a state intertwine with various complex factors that have to a certain extent shaped the evolution of society and the formation of political organization. The surplus of resources acts as a significant catalyst for state formation. Abundant natural resources or technological advancements can lead to a surplus in output, which, in turn, can be employed to meet fundamental needs, freeing up a portion of individuals' time and energy for specialized labor and knowledge accumulation. The expansion of societal scale to a sufficient extent is another critical prerequisite for state formation. The social scale must reach a level capable of accommodating division of labor and social elites. The physical constraints of population also play a crucial role in state formation. Increased population density can result in resource competition and scarcity, necessitating increased collaboration and organization. These physical limitations compel societies to seek more efficient resource allocation and organizational methods, thereby driving the concentration of political power and the emergence of a state. Lastly, the motivation for individuals to relinquish freedom under specific circumstances also influences the formation of a state. For instance, natural disasters, external threats, or other emergencies may force individuals to forfeit certain liberties in exchange for survival and security, accepting collective leadership and organization. According to Fukuyama, a society must meet all the aforementioned conditions for a state to emerge <sup>1</sup>. Consequently, I posit that the purpose of a state's existence can be deduced: to enhance its productivity for the sake of survival. In other words, a state is an organization established to address crises. Even in societies with the potential to evolve into states, human inertia makes it challenging to proactively transition from a comfortable state to a more advanced (and productive) societal state. Humanity requires a driving force for further development, and Fukuyama's stipulated conditions implicitly hint at this impetus: the imperative to evolve to avoid demise. It's important to note that here, "demise" implies large-scale mortality, significant enough to alert individuals within society to the abnormal scale. For contemporary societies, while life expectancy in pre-modern times was significantly lower than today's, this "low" life expectancy was the norm for those earlier eras. An example serves to illustrate this point. In Fukuyama's work, he also mentions that many places did not develop into states. Evidently, this is due to the fact that the natural environment didn't pose sufficient threats to most people's lives. If I were a member of an unknown tribe on an obscure island in Oceania, despite facing life-threatening risks during hunting each day, I wouldn't abstain from

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<sup>1</sup>Fukuyama, Francis. *The Origins of Political Order*. Pages 53-59, 80-94.

hunting. This is because in this tribal society, the constructed norm is to undertake hunting daily, even in the face of life-threatening conditions.

Thus far, a state has taken shape. However, beyond the similarities in organizational structure with contemporary states, I haven't identified other parallels with present-day countries. Most contemporary states prioritize the well-being of their citizens as a paramount goal (although this objective often doesn't hold such a prominent position in practice), as reflected in their constitutions. For instance, the second article of the first chapter of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China states, "All power in the People's Republic of China belongs to the people," and the preamble of the United States Constitution outlines, "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." I previously mentioned that the purpose of a state's existence is an "organization formed to enhance productivity for the sake of survival." However, the objectives of modern states do not seem to entirely align with this notion. Clearly, the transition between these two objectives must have occurred under the influence of certain human or natural factors. In Europe, this transformation took place during the Enlightenment era. Although normative statements about what a state ought to be – that is, political philosophy – had existed prior to this period, their impact on the nature of the state was relatively limited. The Enlightenment era in Europe brought forth numerous new questions, spurred by the standardization of science, encounters with other societies discovered in the Americas, and shifts in demands on political societies. On this foundation, political philosophers began to reexamine the conception of the state. Driven by certain forces, these ideas ultimately began to influence the concept of the state, leading to the emergence of modern states. As such, the apparent difference in the objectives of these states necessitates distinguishing between the two categories. I define the states prior to the Enlightenment era as "pre-modern states," and those after the Enlightenment era as "modern states." It's important to note that contemporary states are not necessarily modern states; contemporary states could also fall under the category of pre-modern states, as in some underdeveloped regions, neither the state nor its populace have been subject to Enlightenment influences, thereby not altering the purpose of the state.

In the subsequent section, I will introduce the thoughts of several political philosophers who have provided justifications for the existence of the state. Through this exploration, I will delve further into the discussion of the purpose of the state.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed that in the state of nature, individuals are naturally free and equal, as mentioned "Man are born free, everywhere he is in chain".

However, the advent of society alters this state, giving rise to inequality and injustice. He emphasized that the social contract is established to safeguard individual freedom and rights, transferring these innate rights to the collective in order to establish a just and orderly society. Rousseau viewed the social contract as a moral agreement through which individuals willingly give up some freedoms in exchange for social order and collective protection <sup>2</sup>. Rousseau underscored that the foundation of the social contract lies in the concept of the "general will," which is the collective will formed by all members for the sake of the greater good. The general will will never err if the authority is exercised under the situation of universal participation, as diverse perspectives are exchanged and information is well communicated <sup>3</sup>. The obligation of individuals is to obey the public will, for within society, individual interests and obligations are closely intertwined with the greater good. He posited that the legitimacy of the state originates from the voluntary consent and consensus of the people, and the authority of the government is established upon the foundation of the people's will. From this, we can deduce that Rousseau believed the purpose of the state's existence is to establish a just, orderly, and equitable social framework that fulfills individual freedoms and rights.

This perspective indeed contrasts with the purpose of the state that I deduced from Fukuyama. Rousseau's social contract theory is primarily rooted in the value concept of individuals actively choosing to construct a political community. Individuals aren't responding passively to their environment; instead, they make rational choices to proactively establish a state for the realization of higher political values. The state represents a higher stage of human political development, a result of human rationality, with its purpose being the realization of democracy and justice within the community. In contrast, Fukuyama's viewpoint places more emphasis on the emergence of the state as an inevitable response to material environmental pressures. The emergence of the state isn't driven by individual rational choices but is a consequence of environmental pressures. This perspective views the state as a functional institution aimed at enhancing productivity rather than realizing specific political ideals. While these two viewpoints might seem conflicting, they are, in essence, not mutually exclusive. Fundamentally, the latter provides a historical foundation for the emergence of the former. When material survival remains a primary concern, individuals are unlikely to harbor desires to establish a rational political community. Only when certain conditions are met (specific conditions will not be discussed in this essay) will individuals pursue higher-level value ideals. Therefore, Fukuyama's depiction of pre-modern states provides the potential conditions for individuals to pursue political ideals. Building upon this, the emergence of Enlightenment thought fosters a vision within individuals to construct a rational

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<sup>2</sup>Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract*. Pages 51-56.

<sup>3</sup>Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract*. Pages 124-128.

political community. Thus, within the existing framework of state forms, individuals attempt to transform the machinery of the state into a just and democratic servant through rational social contracts. These two theories aren't inherently conflicting; instead, they represent an evolutionary relationship. Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as an analogy, once basic material needs are met, individuals seek higher-level spiritual needs. It's important to note that the social contract isn't the sole pathway for the evolution from pre-modern states to modern ones; revolution is also a means of transformation, as mentioned before.

New Confucianist scholar Chan offers his own interpretation of the purpose of the state. According to the perspective of Confucian Perfectionism, political authority isn't naturally endowed but rather acquired through serving the people and advancing the common welfare. Confucian Perfectionism regards this notion as the "service conception"<sup>4</sup>, emphasizing that the existence of political authority is meant to serve the people, ultimately achieving their well-being. Political authority is seen as a tool whose purpose is to create conditions of prosperity and happiness for the people<sup>5</sup>. The legitimacy of authority isn't inherent but is gained through the ruler's virtue, commitments, and the voluntary acceptance of the people. Rulers must demonstrate genuine concern for the people and exhibit the ability to serve them through moral behavior and effective governance, thereby winning the trust and support of the people. Furthermore, within the framework of Confucian Perfectionism, the existence of the state is viewed as a means to achieve the happiness of the people. The purpose of the state extends beyond maintaining order and stability; it also encompasses promoting the prosperity and well-being of the people. The state achieves this by establishing effective political institutions and systems, guaranteeing the rights and interests of the people, and enabling each individual to fully develop and realize their personal value. Chan's viewpoint is fundamentally rooted in the Confucian belief in the inherent goodness of human nature. To avoid irrational decision-making outcomes, the government must apply value judgments independent of democratic mechanisms as criteria for screening political decisions. These judgments pertain to the assessment of the intrinsic goodness of individuals. In summary, Chan's perspective aligns with Confucian Perfectionism, positing that the purpose of the state is to serve the people and enhance their well-being, based on the values of moral governance and the realization of human potential.

Comparing Chan's perspective with Rousseau's, we can indeed identify similarities in their discussions of the purpose of the state. Both viewpoints fundamentally argue that the state exists to serve the people. However, they seem to differ in the specifics of how they justify the state's existence. Chan asserts that the legitimacy of the state

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<sup>4</sup>Chan, Joseph Cho Wai. Confucian Perfectionism. Pages 29-31.

<sup>5</sup>Chan, Joseph Cho Wai. Confucian Perfectionism. Pages 32-35.

is justified through its service to the people and promotion of the common welfare. In other words, the instrumental value of the state itself forms the basis for its legitimacy. On the other hand, Rousseau contends that the legitimacy of the state originates from the social contract established at its inception. This moral agreement constructs the legitimacy of the state. It can be said that the instrumentalism and constructivist perspectives of Chan and Rousseau respectively represent different orientations of ideal inception and practical use. In essence, while both perspectives converge on the purpose of the state being to serve the people, they diverge in how they rationalize this aspect. Chan's perspective emphasizes the practical value of the state's service, while Rousseau's viewpoint emphasizes the constructivist basis of a moral agreement. These differences reflect distinct methodologies of the two routes achieving a similar goal.

In conclusion, this paper has explored the purpose of the existence of the state. The formation of the state is the result of multiple overlapping factors, initially aimed at enhancing productivity and overcoming the limitations of the natural state. Over time, the functions of the state have continued to expand, and the influence of its principles has deepened, as reflected in the evolution of the concept of the state itself. The paper also analyzed the defenses of the legitimacy of the state from both instrumentalism and constructivist perspectives by several political philosophers, in order to further delve into the purpose of the state. It can be observed that the purpose of the state's existence is a dynamic and evolving process, encompassing a range of goals from initial survival needs to later becoming a means to achieve individual and collective ideals. The expansion of functions driven by ideologies has been a crucial force in the evolution of the state.