

# The analysis of thomas hobbes and the government philosophy essay



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Thomas Hobbes argues that in a state of nature there is no community between men because humans are out for themselves and themselves alone. Hobbes affirms this by saying “ the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. ... The condition of man ... is a condition of war of everyone against everyone. (Hobbes, Leviathan), therefore saying that when men are solely operating in the state of nature, power and gain are all we can truly think about. Hobbes believes that this desire can only be overcome with some type of government. In this essay I will look at how government for Hobbes truly control humans’ desire for power? Therefore exploring Hobbes thinking on power and control and whether or not government is truly the only solution to gaining complete harmony amongst humans.

In the Leviathan, Hobbes fully believes that a sovereign is needed in order to have complete harmony among the people. The defining factor that determines how much power someone is to receive depends on the relative presence or absence of different sorts of power, and how people recognize others with power. In Leviathan he generalizes all mankind by saying “” I put for the general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power” (Leviathan Hobbes) how we choose to look at one another is based on how much power we are perceived to have among the community. Hobbes does not believe that power can be shared among one another because of the desire to always have more and to have what others have; Hobbes directly points this out as he says “ The condition of man . . . is a condition of war of everyone against everyone.”(Leviathan Hobbes) further stating, that because of competition people will see each other as rivals and therefore hatred and suspicion will slowly grow, eventually resulting in wars

to take place among men. Hobbes believed that the only way to completely break the state of nature was to use fear. Fear creates the turmoil in the state of nature, and this fear also is able to uphold the peaceful order of society. Hobbes fully believed that the only natural way to control people and keep order was to use human's fear of death he states this by saying "The passions that incline men to peace are: fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living" (Leviathan Hobbes). People believe that the only way to truly escape death is to use power. When the threat of death is placed in front of a human, they are more willing to accept a social contract that will protect them from this threat creating security among the people.

Hobbes claims that the sovereign is still giving people their freedom through what Hobbes calls Law of Nature. He argues that the Laws of Nature are a set of laws which conflicts with the natural instincts of the person in a way that keeps order and peace. The first law that he believes will keep the order is "that every man, ought to endeavor peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it" (Leviathan Hobbes) In other words, this means that humans need to seek peace within one another because this will better man's chance of survival. If we cannot seek peace within one another then we start living our lives with the notion that all people are traitors which thus causes the threat to our own lives as well. The second Law of Nature is put in place as a way to gain this peace; this law proposes that to achieve peace we needed to create covenants. Hobbes creates his third Law of Nature from the second, which states that it is necessary that "men perform their covenants made"(Leviathan Hobbes), this needs to happen because a covenant

becomes invalid if any member violates or is reasonably suspected of violating the regulations of the covenant. The problem here then is that this makes the Three Laws of nature very fragile and easily breakable because of the state of nature. Hobbes proposes that this is the reason that we need some type of governing form that will take on the role of judge. How the people in this society respect and honour this ruler will depend upon how extreme and severe the punishment is for breaking this covenant which is important, because “ the terror of...punishment [must be] greater than the benefit they expect by the breach of their covenant” (Leviathan Hobbes). The main point of this covenant is to scare off individuals from wanting to break the covenant in the first place and to create a “ commonwealth” (Leviathan Hobbes) between people. The third Law of Nature brings together a society where harmony and peace can exist and be maintained between every human. Man gains a better chance at survival and in society and it creates a sense of justice and mutual respect.

Hobbes in his book the Leviathan built a sovereign state that is based on the powers of security. This government can be seen as a protector of persons against the overwhelming State of Nature and therefore is the protection people need from the threat of death. The way this security is met according to Hobbes is through “ commonwealth” (Leviathan Hobbes) if all people abide by the laws set out for them, then all persons are able to live in a society free from war. Hobbes argues “ During the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition called war; and such a war, as if of every man, against every man.” (Hobbes, Leviathan) therefore saying that without the protection of a ruling

government man loses the security that is provide within the social contract. According to Hobbes the commonwealth can be formed in two different ways, agreement or force. Regardless of which route the sovereign chooses to take, both agreement and force holds the same right of power over his subjects and the same responsibilities over the citizens. The foundation of all things comes from the sovereign and to Hobbes the key to unlocking peace. Although Hobbes ultimately believed that we need government to control the state of nature he also thought that the people within this social contract should have certain freedoms and liberties. These liberties included right to food, clothing, shelter and the right to protect them from anyone that is harming them. The rights of the people also contained the right to engage in lawful commerce, the right to educate their children, the right to legal protection of their health and safety, the right to legal protection of their property, and the right to do other things which are not forbidden by the laws of the commonwealth. (Leviathan Hobbes) Hobbes belief is that only under the rule of the sovereign may a subject truly gain their liberty and rights he states this by saying " To this war of every man against every man, this also in consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law, where no law, no injustice. Force, and fraud, is in war the cardinal virtues. (Hobbes, Leviathan) as a result meaning that man cannot understand what freedom is until he is living within the covenant created for the people.

From Hobbes, I found that some of the concepts that he is giving in The Leviathan are valid to how government is run throughout the world. If we

truly look into the question of why we have government in the first place, I think we will find that the importance of our security and our fear of war and death, play a large role in why most countries have government run countries and why we as citizens chose to live within the Laws of the Government. I believe that we look to the government in hope that they will do what is ultimately good for all people within the country and the citizens are able to live in a country where the threat of death is not consistently upon them. For instance, in Canada we live within a social contract when we declare that we are Canadian citizens. By saying that we are Canadian we understand that we have certain rights and freedoms that come with responsibilities and through this citizenship we are able to live in a somewhat safe environment. For the most part we believe that the government's rules and laws are put in place so that we do not threaten the lives of others. For example, a law that is heavily enforced and has a severe punishment is driving under the influence, the reason it is such a big deal in Canada is because of the threat that it causes to human life. Therefore making it crucial to as Hobbes would say it " Social contract/covenant" because it is a threat to man.

One of the problems that I have with Hobbes theory is understanding how people go from a State of Nature to living within a covenant through government? If in fact people are truly selfish then would they not want to continue to live in this State of Nature in hopes that they will someday be able to gain ultimate power over all people? Why would the threat of death matter to someone that is nothing but selfish and cares only about the amount of power that he holds. How do we explain the work that soldiers do

if all people fear the threat of death. For example how would Hobbes explain Pat Tillman who passed up a multimillion-dollar football contract and joined the military, only to have his death manipulated into a propaganda (imdb.com) does his story not contradict with how Hobbes originally viewed human nature, how can someone who is ultimately selfish and only out for power pass up a contract that would make him more powerful. How can we truly trust a government to do what is right for all the citizens when they uses the lives of soldiers as pons for their own benefit. I do not believe that the Government truly holds all the answers as to why people become selfless. I understand Hobbes thinking in the time that he was writing but I cannot fully trust in the idea that people are naturally selfish and a ruling power is the only solution. If we truly believe that we are naturally selfish how is it possible to trust in the people that are leading us, would they not have the same traits as people living within society

In Conclusion, through Hobbes book Leviathan we gain insight into how government and laws protect people from the state of nature. Hobbes set up the groundwork on how he believes the ideal government needs to be set up in order to have complete peace and harmony among citizens. Throughout Leviathan, Hobbes gives us a pessimistic stance on human nature, one that he believes is the reason that we need government set up in the first place. He trusts that government is the only logical way to keeping people from killing one another and in spite of this concept we see man's selfish nature not only among citizens in the social contract but also with government its self. Overall though we can credit Hobbes for his insight, the problems that

he believes can be solved through the powers of the sovereign has not created civil peace and harmony thus far.

## **Work Cited**

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