

Hobbes' international relations theory



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Is the international system a Hobbesian ' war of all against all'?

The aim of the paper is to examine the influence of the political theory of Thomas Hobbes which in International Relations has been seen as the basis for the realist understanding on the case of " anarchy" (Heller, 1980, p. 21) in the international system. In his work " Leviathan", Hobbes provides us with the idea of the man and the state of nature which he link with the political community. Although he has been criticized because some argue that he creates confusion between nature of the man and the political state, Hobbes is seen as an important figure of realism and realist approaches. The essay starts with a brief information about Hobbes and " Leviathan" followed by a definition of anarchy and anarchy of the international state of nature. Observing the implication of state of nature, anarchy, sovereignty in the international system I will link them with different criticism in order to be able to determine whether or not the international system is a Hobbesian state of war.

After the English Civil War, Hobbes wrote " Leviathan" to warn Englishmen for the consequences of insubordination (Heller, 1980, p21). This led to significant change in the political views of Hobbes. In Chapter 13, as Donnelly (2000, p. 13) points out, he presents examples of a " strong" realism. He attempts to model and explain the political relations between the man and the state of nature by describing it as a state of war, where " every man is against every man" (Hobbes, 1660; Hackety, 1994). In " Leviathan", the state of nature is not government and therefore everyone is entitles with the same status which gives the individual the right to do everything without restrictions. However having " no moral restrains" (Korab-Karpowicz & W.

Julian, 2013) and also being greedy for goods makes the individuals invade others to gain.

Hobbes describes anarchy as a “ condition” where there is no culture, no industry, no knowledge, no account of time but there is a constant fear and violence and the life of man is “ poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Leviathan Ref). Despite the critical definition, to avoid such “ condition” men have organized in political orders that provide “ a common power to keep them in awe” – it is the state of international relations that bring the danger of anarchy (Hobbes, Heller, 1980, p. 24). Hobbes says that the “ kings, and persons of sovereign authority” are in constant conflict because of their “ jealousies” (Hobbes Quoted in Heller, 1980, p24). This could be described as a condition of war among states but they do not violate each other constantly. Moreover in relations between states there is no permanent common authority (Heller, 1980) which means that war remains permanent threat.

This condition differs from the state of war – “ every man against every man”, because Yurdusev (2006, p315) suggest that in the international state of nature, states uphold the industry of their subjects which frees the individuals from the misery they experience. Hobbes says that man are equal capable to do things, so even “ the weakest can kill the strongest”(Hobbes; Heller, 1980, 20-25). In comparison to the men in their nature, state are not equal to each other. United States and Soviet Union work as example because these two states held industry, navigation, culture giving them more power and control over the individuals during the Second World War and The Cold War. Therefore there is a possibility of order by

strong states which summarized means that since states are not equal, they would not be equally intolerable (Vincent, 1981; Yurdusey, 2006, p. 316). However there is also a possibility that states are equal as men are, because if there was universal nuclear proliferation this would have created the “equality of fear” giving the chance and capability of a state to “kill” other state (Gauthier, 1957; Heller, 1980, p. 24-27).

However, the Hobbesian meaning of “life” and “death” could be misunderstood when it comes to states. According to Hobbes (1660; Hackett, 1994), “life” is the “artificial soul” which gives “life and motion to the whole body”. Therefore, states are not killed when a big part of its population and territory are destroyed, but they lose their sovereign power to make and amend laws (Morgenthau, 1947, Heller, 1980). This condition could be achieved with a minimal amount of force or by threat. States are “alive” (Heller, 1980) when they are able to maintain their authority over citizens and also the ability to protect them like no other government. Boucher (1998, p. 293-95) suggests that state’s actions are easy to predict if motivated by their interests, but on the other hand states follow their momentary interests making them a big threat because we never know when they would attack. For example, Kuwait was invaded by Iraq in 1990, on the grounds of interest over Kuwait’s natural resource – petroleum. This proves us again that states have more wants and needs, and that Hobbes’s idea of equality within states does not occur.

States are constructed to provide men with internal peace and protect them from external affairs (Yurdusev, 2006, 313). To maintain their sovereignty, they have to protect their rights and their territory. According to Heller

(1980, p. 26), Hobbes's condition of equality of ability is "satisfied" only when the weakest can actually 'kill' the strongest state. The idea of universal nuclear proliferation could be furthermore seen as the solution and however bring anarchy within states. With nuclear weapons the weaker states will have the capability to attack the stronger one, but on the other hand it might cause destruction to sovereignty (Heller 1980, 26). For example, if we suppose that a less powerful state as Nicaragua or any Middle East country, are able to obtain nuclear weapons they would actually lay them down in order to gain freedom from the world Leviathan - e. g., United States, Russia. Therefore, until this case of fear exists among states, equality of ability and fear would not exist.

Life of the state is defined by Hobbes (Leviathan, 1660; Hackett, 1994) as the existing of sovereignty. Since life and state are "congruent" (Hobbes quoted by Heller, 1980, p. 27), survival has been seen as a "necessary value" (McNeilly, 1968, p. 178-81) and death as its ultimate aversion. Simply, while the state works in favor to survive it will achieve its objectives and vice versa, state must accomplish their objectives in order to survive. As Heller (1980, 27) suggests, this calls in question the capability of states to tolerate the state of nature because as it has occurred in the past, whole nations such as Rome, has disappeared. Therefore we cannot argue that the international state of nature has prevailed because it has not been intolerable, but it has been fatal (Heller, 1980) for its victims - Rome.

In the international state of nature, the weakest fear from the others because of their low capability to defend themselves. If there is no equality between weak and strong states, then this would further undermine the

capacity to state to defend itself (Heller, 1980, 24-26). Strong states have no fear of the weaker states but they do fear the other limited number of strong states because they are enough to “ threaten the survival of any strong state” (Heller, 1980, 27-30). The war against all might exists and torment only the weaker state because they are defenseless. Heller (1980) suggests a situation where one state is stronger than the others, and these other states are trying to improve their position and so the chance to survive. This would lead to the creation of international anarchy where we have on main Leviathan.

Leviathan is a “ corporate body” (Williams, 1996, p227) and its strengths are the strengths of the others. It never sleeps or dies making it immortal. As immortal, “ it transcend the limitations that simple individuals encounter in their attempts to survive in the state of nature” (Williams, 1996). Williams (1996) suggests that the result is that “ the radical equality that defines the state of nature composed of individuals is not present in the relations between states”. Therefore since the states and individuals do not have the same conditions, states can use these anarchic qualities among themselves to form more stable form of “ coexistence” (Hobbes; Williams, 1996; Heller, 1980). Despite the continuing absence of the Leviathan in the international system, this absence has not stated an anarchic state of nature.

Hobbes present to us the idea that “ the right of sovereigns are designed to ensure the indivisibility and absolute character of the sovereign’s power (Hobbes; Heller, 1980). Furthermore, he adds that the divided sovereignty is no sovereignty at all. Clark and Sohn (Heller 1980, p. 25-30) suggest that if a world organization is created, war might be prevented because of the

monopoly power and military power which the central law-making power holds. Therefore this idea of a world commonwealth is untenable because it looks at the state as a negotiator between individual men and world sovereignty (Heller 1980). However even though a world organization was created this would have led to a destruction.

Hoffmann (1967) presents to us the “halfway house” argument where Goldsmith (Quoted by Heller, 1980) further explains it as if states are to get out of the state of nature, they must agree on the laws of nature. However if states could agree on the laws of nature, there would be no need to get out of the state of nature. (Goldsmith, 1966; Gauthier, 1969) In the international system nowadays there are inter-governmental organizations – formed only from governments, which are similar to the idea of Leviathan. League of Nations and United Nations are organization where security and peace are promoted. They try to establish a “collective security” (Heller, 1980, p31). In the doctrine of collective security, as Heller (1980) further explains, the states have to “alienate” their sovereignty and join against aggressive states and participate in implication of restriction on them. However this whole idea of “collective security” did not really work out well in the League of Nations because it could only work if the states have actually transferred their sovereign power to the “supra-national” entity.

To summarize, we first looked at the implication of Hobbesian theory about the nature of state, the man and anarchy. We saw how this “condition” of anarchy can differ and how it links with the war against all within the international system. Furthermore, we looked at the meaning of the Hobbesian “life” and “death” to the state which helps us to understand why

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states actions are easy to predict. Boucher (1998) and Heller (1980) has introduced different arguments to explain the concepts of anarchic state of nature and the “ Leviathan” and the link between them. However Hoffmans (1967) “ halfway house” argument clearly proves that the international anarchy wants to overtake the states sovereignty.

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