

Critique of thomas hobbes's leviathan

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Wright State University Modern PoliticalPhilosophyEssay 1 Critique of Thomas Hobbes's " Leviathan" Wes Miller PHL 432 Donovan Miyasaki 10/9/2012 Thomas Hobbes was an English philosopher best known for his 1651 text " Leviathan". In " Leviathan" Hobbes suggests that human nature is one of competition, diffidence, and glory. I will argue against this assertion, claiming that human nature is not one of war and mistrust, but one of cooperation and collaboration. I will conclude by stating that man works together to achieve the common goal of survival, happiness, and advancement of the human race.

Hobbes begins his explanation of the state of nature in chapter 13 of " Leviathan" by stating that all men are equal in nature. Although one man may be stronger or more intelligent than another, humans are relatively equal in every way because of their ability to manipulate and form alliances: " For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger as himself. " 1 Because men are all equal, Hobbes believed that they desire the same things. If two men share the same desire, they become enemies.

If all men are equal, there is no way for one man to be master of all other men. If a single man were to attempt to gain power over all other men, he would be overthrown by those he was trying to have power over. Considering that all are naturally equal, and all naturally desire the same things, the nature of man, according to Hobbes, is war: " So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory" (293). In this constant state of war there is no

desire for any technological advancements or culture because there would be no use for either.

Many other aspects of life are thrown aside as well: "no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitarily, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (293). Hobbes claims that in this state of nature, there is no place for any type of justice or understanding of right and wrong.

Because there is no society, there is no agreement on any type of guidelines between men. Because there are no guidelines, there is no way to be unjust. Therefore, every action in the state of nature is just. For example, it is perfectly just to steal from someone if they hold something that you desire (such as food, shelter, etc.) Hobbes goes on to explain that the only reasons that humans would be in a state of peace would be the fear of death and the desire for commodious living. Hobbes gives a very pessimistic view of human nature.

If his claims that the human nature is one of competition, diffidence, and glory were correct, the world that we live in today would be impossible to achieve. If every man was constantly at war with every other man as Hobbes claims, there would be absolutely no room for any technological advancement. He says this himself: "In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain" (293). If what Hobbes claims

is true, the human race would not even exist. Mankind would have destroyed itself before it was able to create any kind of society.

Simply by looking back at how the world evolved to be the way it is today, anyone can see that the human race as a whole has been extremely successful. Humans worked together, formed alliances, and constantly took steps to achieve a more balanced society. Although many of these attempts have been unsuccessful, they were still attempts nonetheless. The fact that the advancement of society was even attempted proves that humans had to have worked together. I agree with Hobbes's view that no man can be master of all men, but I do, however, believe that some men can be masters of some men.

For example, the monarchial systems of England and China were successful for thousands of years. Humans have a pack mentality, much like wolves. Some are leaders, and others are followers, this has been true since the dawn of man. There have always been chieftains, kings, and presidents leading a group of other humans. Because of this system, all men are not entirely equal. Some men have power over other men. The situations in which men can be at peace with each other is exactly what Hobbes said, fear of death, but is it not true that all men fear death?

If man did not fear death, the human race would die out. There has to be a fear of death in order to survive. So, if there must be a fear of death to survive, and all men have a natural fear death, would this not mean that man's nature is one of peace? One might argue that the societies in place today are constantly at war with each other, that societies are groups of people acting as an individual, proving that Hobbes's idea of a human nature

in which we are constantly at war is correct. I would reply, however, with another question.

Isn't society a result of a mass amount of collaboration between human beings? Because the societies at war are made up of a large group of people acting as an individual, one can come to the conclusion that before societies were created, there was only cooperation. If human nature is one of constant conflict and mistrust, societies could not have been created in the first place. So, if before society existed there was only cooperation, one could say that society itself is the cause of all conflict, the opposite of Hobbes's suggestion.

I have argued that Hobbes's idea of the human nature being one of constant conflict and mistrust is false. Humans have always trusted each other and worked together to advance the species as a whole. If there wasn't cooperation before society, society would have never existed at all. Hobbes states that human nature does not allow industrial advancement, but industrial advancement has obviously been achieved. He claims that man can only be at peace when he fears death, yet men naturally fear death, therefore man's nature is one of peace.

The fact that Societies are constantly at war does not prove Hobbes's theory correct, it does the opposite. Societies are a result of humans working together, therefore human nature is one of cooperation. It is difficult to know how humans would act in a complete state of nature, but merely the fact that man exists today is proof that our nature is not one of war. 1. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, in *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (New York: Oxford, 2011), 293