

Hobbes thinks that sovereign power is both absolute and indivisible. what reasons...

[History](#)



The paper " Thomas Hobbes's Concept of a Society and Government " is a spectacular example of a term paper on philosophy. Thomas Hobbes, one of the most successful English philosophers. To a considerable extent, he attempted to explain the nature of a government and its implication in society and to the people. In his view, society is initially in a state of nature. This implies that people co-exist in nature, possessing equal rights and equal power. He argues that society is at great risk of war due to a lot of competition and insecurity among the members. It is for this reason that the people decide to entrust the power into the hands of one person, in order that he can safeguard them from devouring one another. Thus, Hobbes sees the government as a sovereign power, handed to one person by the society on condition that they obtain security against one another. This article seeks to expound on one of the major arguments of Hobbes that sovereign power is absolute and indivisible. Moreover, it covers the implications of such power to the society that creates it.

Referring to Hobbes argument, power is sovereign (Hobbes, 1967, p. 228). This means that power belongs to a single person who is above the people. This individual controls the society's resources, the people as well as establishing the guidelines to be followed. The people have no rights over their leader, and this makes it even harder for them to rebel. This is because the people give up all their power to such an individual and trusts that such a contract eliminates the state of war that naturally exists between the people. In his works, Hobbes boldly claims that this sovereign power heaved on the shoulder of one individual, becomes absolute and indivisible (Hampton,

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1986).

In reference to Hobbes arguments, sovereign power is absolute because it belongs to one single person and this gives them the right to give judgment with finality, without expecting any objection from any other party. This gives them the mandate to decide for the people and make them adhere to these decisions. This power is also indivisible. This implies that the power cannot be shared with any other person and hence lies solely on the chosen leader. In case power would be distributed among many individuals, then this would result in multiple decisions and hence a source of disagreement. This would reverse the system to the state of nature as these power holders compete to have their decisions implemented. Thus, this indivisible power ensures that no disagreements arise, and hence peace to the people as they follow the only set of available decisions (Hampton, 1986).

The submissiveness of the people to hand over their power to one single individual results from mistrust. They believe that if every person were to take care of their own, there would be different opinions as well as objectives. The motives of people would be to pursue their individual goals in whatever means. This motive of the people, according to Hobbes, has nothing wrong literally. However, it would lead to unhealthy competition amongst them, which would have adverse consequences resulting in animosity. Handing over their power to one individual gives that person enough authority to guarantee the people of security among one another. In this way, they form a contract with this leader (Hobbes, 1967, p. 192).

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Therefore, the leader has the mandate to protect the people against one another.

This submission of sovereign power to a single individual in exchange for security has its own drawbacks. First of all, there is an abuse of this power. This happens when the sovereign leader betrays the expectation of his followers by failing in his responsibility to protect them from each other. This leader may fail to represent the people's needs because he or she is above the law and that people have little say about the rules and strategies that he or she lays down. This commonly happens because the leaders may overrule the contract which formed the government. This imparts a feeling of betrayal to the people of the state forcing them to react to the situation. However, in such a system, the power holder is overall to the people and hence their opinions and ideas do not count much, making it hard for people to repossess these rights (Hobbes, 1967, p. 232). Therefore, people are often forced to bear the tyrannical leadership.

However, in the event of such a situation, the people rise up and try to defend themselves by evaluating whether the government does right or wrong (Beiner, 2010, p. 1124). This is because absolute sovereignty is subject to the condition that the leader should not order the people to kill themselves. Consequently, they remain with the option of finding a way of repossessing that power or handing it over to a different individual. To achieve this, they organize rebellions against the leader forcing him or her out of this position. When a rebellion occurs, such leadership can be

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terminated, and the power shifted to a different person. In a democratic commonwealth setting, society chooses their leader through a democratic process.

In conclusion, Thomas Hobbes illustrates the concept of a government as a contract between the people and a sovereign leader. In a natural society, the people show mistrust of one another, which in turn develops insecurity as people struggle to achieve their goals without minding one another. Consequently, they give up their power and surrender the power to a single individual, who can now be able to prevent them from killing one another. When such a leader fails to guarantee personal security, they may decide to hand over this power to a different individual. Despite criticism, this theory remains significant in explaining the establishment of a government.